

WHERE
THE
DEAD MEN LIE
AND
OTHER POEMS


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BY

BARCROFT BOAKE

EDITED, WITH NOTES AND MEMOIR, BY A. G. STEPHENS

AND THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

By MAHONY, LAMBERT and FISCHER

SYDNEY
ANGUS AND ROBERTSON
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Second Thousand

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PREFACE.

WHEN preparing these verses for the press, the first question which met me was this: Should Boake be treated from a literary standpoint or from a personal standpoint—as poet or as man and poet? I chose the personal standpoint. To consider Boake as a literary figure, with an eye chiefly to his literary reputation, meant omission of whatever herein is crude or weak, in order that readers should judge him only by his best. Such a course implied loss and discontent to many persons who care little for the niceties of style, and find in vigorous picturing and natural emotion ample amends for bad rhymes and false accents And, what is more important, such a course would have given a wrong impression of Boake. Some of his most valuable work lies in fragments of poems which as wholes seem comparatively ineffective. These fragments could not be divorced from the context, yet were not lightly to be discarded. Further, Boake's least remarkable compositions, with two or three exceptions, are as characteristic of Australia and of himself as are

the most remarkable. So, instead of trying to exalt the Poet by his work, I have tried rather to show the Man in his poetry.

This decision brought an easy answer to the second question: How far was it justifiable to prune or polish Boake's verses: how far was it desirable? Plainly, the less trimming the better; since his errors are a part of Boake, and every one removed helps to misrepresent him. Nor was it certain that a foreign hand would not mar as much as it mended. Sometimes Boake has gained variety and force at the expense of metre and rhyme; and to alter is to plunge deep in the old controversy whether gain of mechanical correctness balances loss of picturesque vigour. So I have not attempted to patch Boake's garment with alien cloth. I have carefully compared the printed poems with available originals, correcting errors of the press and adopting a few alternative readings sanctioned by MS.; and occasionally I have strengthened a line or changed a word where the advantage seemed obvious or the necessity great.

The order of the verses is that of convenience. There is in many cases no clue to the precise dates of composition, which did not coincide with the dates of publication: hence exact chronological order is unattainable. And Boake's poetic harvest was reaped in so brief a time—some eighteen months—that there is little material difference of merit between his earlier and his later verses.

Of the thirty-one indexed poems which follow, twenty-five were printed in *The Bulletin*, and two in *The Sydney Mail*: four now appear for the first time. The Bulletin Newspaper Company, Limited, is acting in the matter of this publication as trustee for Boake's near relatives, who share with the publishers Messrs. Angus and Robertson, any profits accruing after expenses have been paid.

I have to tender warm thanks to Messrs. F. P. Mahony, A. J. Fischer, and G. W. Lambert, the artists who have illustrated the volume, and to whose talent and pains is due much of any interest it may possess. I gratefully acknowledge, also, the care and skill of the engravers, Messrs. Benton and Bacon, Mr. Irwin (of *The Daily Telegraph*), and Mr. Hamilton (of *The Bulletin*); and especially of the printers, Messrs. Websdale, Shoosmith, and Co.

And, identifying myself as nearly as may be with Barcroft Boake, to the memory of his mother and to Australia I dedicate this book.

A. G. STEPHENS.

Sydney, 29th July, 1897.

THE LAND OF DUMB DESPAIR.

Beyond where farthest drought-fires burn,
By hand of fate it once befell,
I reached the Realm of No-Return
That meets the March of Hell.

A silence crueller than Death
Laid fetters on the fateful air:
She holds no hope; she fights for breath --
The Land of Dumb Despair!

Here fill their glasses, red as blood,
The victims of fell Fortune's frown;
They drink their wine as brave men should,
And fling the goblets down.

They crowd the board, red wreaths of rose
Across their foreheads drooped and curled,
But in their eyes the gloom that knows
The grief of all the world.

The poison lies behind their wine
So close, the trembling hands that take
Might well be doubted to divine
Which draught such thirst would slake.

The bows beside their hands are strung ;
  The blue steel glitters, bare of sheath :
'Tis wonder tired Life drags among
  So many ways to Death !

They may not whisper, one to one,
  The stories of their fancied fall :
The words that ring beneath the sun
  Would faint in such a pall.

In silence, man by man, they reach
  For cup, for arrow, or for sword,
And still the grey world fills the breach
  Each leaves beside the board.

W. H. OGILVIE.

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POEMS



FROM THE FAR WEST

'Tis a song of the Never Never land—
Set to the tune of a scorching gale
On the sandhills red,
When the grasses dead
Loudly rustle, and bow the head
To the breath of its dusty hail:

Where the cattle trample a dusty pad
Across the never-ending plain,
And come and go
With muttering low
In the time when the rivers cease to flow,
And the Drought King holds his reign;

When the fiercest piker who ever turned
With lowered head in defiance proud,
Grown gaunt and weak,
Release doth seek
In vain from the depths of the slimy creek-
His sepulchre and his shroud ;

His requiem sung by an insect host,
Born of the pestilential air,
That seethe and swarm
In hideous form
Where the stagnant waters lie thick and warm,
And Fever lurks in his lair :

Where a placid, thirst-provoking lake
Clear in the flashing sunlight lies—
But the stockman knows
No water flows
Where the shifting mirage comes and goes
Like a spectral paradise ;

And, crouched in the saltbush' sickly shade,
Murmurs to Heaven a piteous prayer :
'O God ! must I
Prepare to die ?'
And, gazing up at the brazen sky,
Reads his death-warrant there.

Gaunt, slinking dingoes snap and snarl,
Watching his slowly-ebbing breath ;
    Crows are flying,
    Hoarsely crying
Burial service o'er the dying—
Foul harbingers of Death.

Full many a man has perished there,
Whose bones gleam white from the waste of sand-
    Who left no name
    On the scroll of Fame,
Yet died in his tracks, as well became
A son of that desert land.





JACK'S LAST MUSTER

The first flush of grey light, the herald of daylight,
Is dimly outlining the musterers' camp,
Where over the sleeping the stealthily creeping
Breath of the morning lies chilly and damp,

As, blankets forsaking, 'twixt sleeping and waking,
The black-boys turn out to the manager's call—
Whose order, of course, is, 'Be after the horses,
And take all sorts of care you unhobble them all!'

Then, each with a bridle (provokingly idle),
They saunter away his commands to fulfil,
Where, cheerily chiming, the musical rhyming
From equine bell-ringers comes over the hill.

But now the dull dawning gives place to the morning:
The sun, springing up in a glorious flood
Of golden-shot fire, mounts higher and higher,
Till the crests of the sandhills are stained with his
blood.

Now hobble-chains' jingling, with thud of hoofs
mingling,
Though distant, sounds near—the cool air is so still—
As, urged by their whooping, the horses come trooping
In front of the boys round the point of the hill.

What searching and rushing for bridles and brushing
Of saddle marks, tight'ning of breastplate and girth!
And what a strange jumble of laughter and grumble—
Some comrade's misfortune the subject of mirth.

I recollect well how that morning Jack Bell
Had an argument over the age of a mare—
The C O B gray one, the dam of that bay one
Which storekeeper Brown calls the Young Lady
Clare;

How Tomboy and Vanity caused much profanity,
Scamp'ring away with their tails in the air,
Till, after a chase at a deuce of a pace,
They ran back in the mob and we collared them
there.

Then the laugh and the banter, as gaily we canter,
With a pause for the nags at a miniature lake,
Where the yellowtop catches the sunlight in patches,
And lies like a mirror of gold in our wake.

O, the rush and the rattle of fast-fleeing cattle,
Whose hoofs beat a mad rataplan on the earth !
Their hot-headed flight in ! Who would not delight in
The gallop that seems to hold all life is worth ?

And over the rolling plains slowly patrolling
To the sound of the cattle's monotonous tramp,
Till we hear the sharp pealing of stockwhips, revealing
The fact that our comrades have put on the camp.

From the spot where they're drafting the wind rises, wafting
The dust till it hides man and beast from our gaze,
Till, suddenly lifting and easterly drifting,
We catch a short glimpse of the scene through the haze —

A blending and blurring of swiftly recurring
Colour and movement, that pass on their way ;
An intricate weaving of sights and sounds, leaving
An eager desire to take part in the fray ;

A dusty procession, in circling succession,
Of bullocks that bellow in impotent rage ;
A bright panorama, a soul-stirring drama—
The sky for its background, the earth for its stage.

How well I remember that twelfth of November
When Jack and his little mare, Vanity, fell!
On the Diamantina there never was seen a
Pair who could cut out a beast half as well.

And yet in one second Death's finger had beckoned,
And horse and bold rider had answered the call
Brooking no hesitation, without preparation,
That sooner or later must come to us all.

Thrice a big curly-horned Cobb bullock had scorned
To meekly acknowledge the ruling of Fate;
Thrice Jack with a clout of his whip cut him out,
But each time the beast galloped back to his mate.

Once more he came blund'ring along, with Jack
thund'ring
Beside him, his spurs in poor Vanity's flanks,
When, from some cause or other forsaking its mother,
A little white calf trotted out from the ranks.

'Twas useless, I knew it; yet I turned to pursue it:
At the same time I gave a loud warning to Jack:
It was all unavailing: I saw him come sailing
Along as the weaner ran into his track.

Little Vanity tried to turn off on one side,
Then altered her mind and attempted to leap . . .
The pace was too fast: that jump was her last;
For she and her rider fell all in a heap.

I was quickly down kneeling beside him, and feeling
With tremulous hand for the throb of his heart.
'The mare—is she dead?' were the first words he
said,
As he suddenly opened his eyes with a start.

He spoke to the creature—his hand could just reach
her—
Gently caressing her lean Arab head:
She acknowledged his praising with eyes quickly
glazing . . .
A whinny . . . a struggle . . . and there she lay
dead!

I sat there and nursed his head, for we durst
Not remove him: we knew where he fell he would die.
As I watched his life flicker, his breath growing
thicker,
I'd have given the world to be able to cry.

Rough-voiced, sunburnt men, far away beyond ken
Of civilisation, our comrades, stood nigh—
All true-hearted mourners, and sadly forlorn as
He gave them a handshake and bade them good-bye.

In my loving embrace there he finished life's race,
And nobly and gamely that long course was run;
Though a man and a sinner he weighed out a winner,
And God, the Great Judge, will declare he has won.

A MEMORY

Adown the grass-grown paths we strayed
The evening cowslips oped
Their yellow eyes to look at her ;
The love-sick lilies moped
With envy that she rather chose
To take a creamy-petalled rose
And lean it 'gainst her ebon hair,
All in that garden fair.

A languid breeze, with stolen scent
Of box-bloom in his grasp,
Sighed out his longing in her ear,
And with his dying gasp
Scattered the perfume at her feet
To blend with others not less sweet :
He loved her, but she did not care,
All in that garden fair.

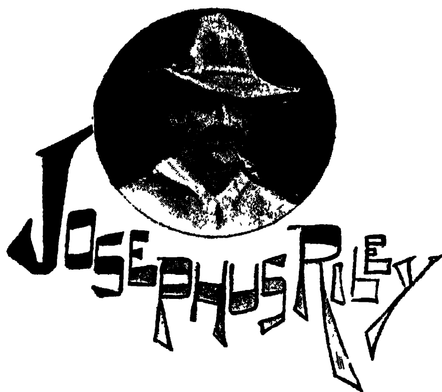


The rose she honoured nodded down :
   His comrades burst with spite :
Poor fool ! he knew not he was doomed
   To barely last the night.
Are hearts to her but as that flower,
The plaything of a careless hour,
To lacerate and never spare
All in that garden fair ?

I held her hand that I might trace
   Her fortune in its palm :
A bolder moonbeam than the rest
   Crept up and kissed her arm,
And, kissing once, was loth to leave,
So hid himself within the sleeve
That clasped the lithe arm, white and bare,
All in that garden fair.

I traced her fortune : love and wealth—
   Though life, alas ! was short.
But will that wealth be bought with love ?
   Or love with wealth be bought ?
I know not : knowing only this—
Her hand seemed waiting for a kiss :
I longed to, but I did not dare,
All in that garden fair.

But she, alas! is not for me,
  And I am not for her;
Yet ever deep within my heart
  A faint regret must stir—
A thrill of longing that among
Those moonlit paths with lover's tongue
I might return, and woo her there
All in that garden fair.



The rum was rich and rare :
There were wagers in the air :
The atmosphere was rosy, and the tongues were
wagging free ;
But *one* was in the revel
Whose occiput was level—
Plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree !

The conversation's flow
Was not devoid of blow,
And neither was it wanting in the mild, colloquial D.
With a most ingenuous smile,
'This here is not my style,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

'And I wouldn't be averse
To emptying my purse,
And laying some small wager with the present companee:
To cut the matter short,
Foot-racing is my forte,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.



'I think it's on the cards
I can run three hundred yards
(The match to be decided where you gentlemen agree)
Against your fleetest horse:
The race would prove a source
Of pleasure,' said Josephus, from the North Countree.

'To equalise the task,
This little start I ask:
The rider, ere he follows, must imbibe a cup of tea—
A simple breakfast-cup
He will have to swallow up.
That's me!—Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.'

Then a knowing 'un looked wise—
Begged to apologise;
But might he ask what temp'rature the liquid was to be?
Would it come from out the pot
Milkless, steaming, boiling hot?
'Oh, not at all!' said Riley, from the North Countree.

'Allow me to explain:
I do observe with pain
This jocular reflection on my native honestee.
My bump of truth is huge:
I'd scorn a subterfuge,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

'Before the parties start
I'll take the Judge apart
To prove, by tasting, whether I have tampered with the tea;
And I beg to state again
Your suspicions give me pain,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

Then they all were satisfied
That the match was 'boneefied':
The bond was signed, and Riley went to 'preparate' the tea;
But his slow, ambiguous smile
Would have seemed to token guile
In any man but Riley, from the North Countree.



He brought the fatal cup
By its saucer covered up :
The Judge examined its contents with awful gravitee;
Then read the papers o'er,
But could not find a flaw :
'Wade in, Josephus Riley, from the North Countree!'



Then the wagerer just bowed,
And, passing through the crowd,
He handed up the beverage unto the wageree ;
And off across the flat,
Springing gaily, pit-a-pat,
Went plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

But behind him what a yell
Of execration fell
From lips that lent themselves to shapes of great profanitee!
For the people of that town
Were done a lovely brown
By plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

And here's the reason why:
The tea was simply DRY!
You might *eat* it, but to drink it was impossibilitee;
Yet, curious to state,
Men did not appreciate
This hum'rous innovation from the North Countree.

You'll understand, of course,
That wager was a source
Of very little profit to the hapless wageree;
And, dating from that day,
I much regret to say
Men look askance at Riley, from the North Countree.

A VISION OUT WEST

Far-reaching downs, a solid sea sunk everlastingly
to rest,
And yet whose billows seem to be for ever heaving
toward the west :
The tiny field-mice make their nests, the summer
insects buzz and hum
Among the hollows and the crests of this wide ocean
stricken dumb,
Whose rollers move for ever on, though sullenly, with
fettered wills,
To break in voiceless wrath upon the crumbled bases
of far hills,
Where rugged outposts meet the shock, stand fast,
and hurl them back again,
An avalanche of earth and rock, in tumbled frag-
ments on the plain ;
But, never heeding the rebuff, to right and left they
kiss the feet
Of hanging cliff and bouldered bluff till on the farther
side they meet,
And once again resume their march to where the
afternoon sun dips
Toward the west, and Heaven's arch salutes the Earth
with ruddy lips.

Such is the scene that greets the eye: wide sweep of plain to left and right:
In front low hills that seem to lie wrapped in a veil of yellow light—
Low peaks that through the summer haze frown from their fancied altitude,
As some small potentate might gaze upon a ragged multitude.
Thus does the battlemented pile of high-built crags, all weather-scarred,
Where grass land stretches mile on mile, keep scornful solitary guard;
Where the sweet spell is not yet broke, while from her wind-swept, sun-kissed dream
Man's cruel touch has not yet woke this Land where silence reigns supreme:

Not the grim silence of a cave, some vaulted stalactited room,
Where feeble candle-shadows wave fantastically through the gloom—
But restful silence, calm repose: the spirit of these sky-bound plains
Tempers the restless blood that flows too fiery through the swelling veins;
Breathes a faint message in the ear, bringing the weary traveller peace;
Whispers, 'Take heart and never fear, for soon the pilgrimage will cease!

Beat not thy wings against the cage! Seek not to
burst the padlocked door
That leads to depths thou canst not gauge! Life is
all thine: why seek for more?
Read in the slow sun's drooping disc an answer to
the thoughts that vex:
Ponder it well, and never risk the substance for its
dim reflex.'

Such is the silent sermon told to those who care to
read this page
Where once a mighty ocean rolled in some dim, long-
forgotten age.
Here, where the Mitchell grass waves green, the
never-weary ebb and flow
Of glassy surges once was seen a thousand thousand
years ago:
To such a sum those dead years mount that Time has
grown too weary for
The keeping of an endless count, and long ago forgot
their score.

But now—when, hustled by the wind, fast-flying,
fleecy cloud-banks drift
Across the sky where, silver-skinned, the pale moon
shines whene'er they lift,
And throws broad patches in strange shapes of light
and shade, that seem to meet
In dusky coastline where sharp capes jut far into a
winding-sheet

Of ghostly, glimmering, silver rays that struggle
'neath an inky ledge
Of driving cloud, and fill deep bays rent in the
shadow's ragged edge—
Sprung from the gloomy depths of Time, faint shapes
patrol the spectral sea,
Primeval phantom-forms, that climb the lifeless
billows silently,
Trailing along their slimy length in thirst for one
another's blood,
Writhing in ponderous trials of strength, as once
they did before the flood.



They sink, as, driven from the North by straining oar
and favouring gale,
A misty barge repels the froth which hides her with
a sparkling veil :

High-curled the sharpened beak doth stand, slicing
the waters in the lead ;
The low hull follows, thickly manned by dim, dead
men of Asian breed.
Swift is her passage, short the view the wan moon's
restless rays reveal
Of dusky, fierce-eyed warrior crew, of fluttering cloth
and flashing steel ;
Of forms that mouldered ages past, ere from recesses
of the sea,
With earthquake throes this land was cast in Nature's
writhing agony.

As the warm airs of Spring-time chase reluctant snows
from off the range,
And plant fresh verdure in their place, so the dim-
visioned shadows change ;
And glimpses of what yet shall be bid the past fly
beyond all ken,
While rising from futurity appear vast colonies of
men
Who from the sea-coast hills have brought far-
quarried spoils to build proud homes
Of high-piled palaces, all wrought in sloping roofs
and arching domes,
Smooth-pillared hall, or cool arcade, and slenderest
sky-piercing spire,
Where the late-sinking moon has laid her tender tints
of mellow fire,

And golden paves the spacious ways where, o'er the smoothen granite flags,
The lightning-driven car conveys its freight with force that never lags.

A goodly city! where no stain of engine-smoke or factory grime
Blemishes walls that will retain their pristine pureness for all time:
Lying as one might take a gem and set it in some strange device
Of precious metal, and might hem it round with stones of lesser price—
So from encircling fields doth spring this city where, in emerald sheen,
Man hath taught Nature how to bring a mantle of perennial green—
Hewing canals whose banks are fringed by willows bending deeply down
To waters flowing yellow-tinged beneath the moon toward the town—
Filling from mighty reservoirs, sunk in the hollows of the plain,
That flood the fields without a pause though Summer should withhold her rain.
Labour is but an empty name to those who dwell within this land,
For they have boldly learnt to tame the lightning's flash with iron hand:

That Force, the dartings from whose eyes not even
    gods might brave and live,
The blasting essence of the skies, proud Jupiter's
    prerogative—
His flashing pinions closely clipt, pent in a cunning-
    fashioned cage,
Of all his flaming glory stript—these men direct his
    tempered rage:
A bondman, at their idlest breath with silent energy
    he speeds,
From dawn of life to hour of death, to execute their
    slightest needs.

* * * * * *

Slow to her touch the moon doth creep, but, going,
    melts in sparkling tears
Of dew, because we may not keep this vision of the
    future years:
Swiftly, before the sunrise gleam, I watch it melting
    in the morn—
The snowy city of my dream, the home of nations yet
    unborn!



Yes ! there it hangs upon the wall
   And never gives a sound :
The hand that trimmed its greenhide fall
   Is hidden underground—
There, in that patch of sallee shade,
   Beneath that grassy mound.

I never take it from the wall :
   That whip belonged to *him*—
The man I singled from them all :
   He was my husband, Jim.
I see him now—so straight and tall,
   So long and lithe of limb.

That whip was with him night and day
  When he was on the track :
I've often heard him laugh and say
  That when they heard it crack,
After the breaking of the drought,
  The cattle all came back.

And all the time that Jim was here,
  A-working on the run,
I'd hear that whip ring sharp and clear
  Just about set of sun,
To let me know that he was near
  And that his work was done.

I was away that afternoon,
  Penning the calves, when—bang !
I heard his whip : 'twas rather soon
  A thousand echoes rang
And died away among the hills,
  As toward the hut I sprang.

I made the tea and waited, but,
  Seized by a sudden whim,
I went and sat outside the hut
  And watched the light grow dim
I waited there till after dark,
  But not a sign of Jim.

The evening air was damp with dew :
Just as the clock struck ten
His horse came riderless—I knew
What was the matter *then* . . .
Why should the Lord have singled out
My Jim from other men ?

I took the horse and found him where
He lay beneath the sky,
With blood all clotted in his hair.
I felt too dazed to cry :
I held him to me as I prayed
To God that I might die.

But sometimes now I seem to hear—
Just when the air grows chill—
A single whip-crack, sharp and clear,
Re-echo from the hill.
That's Jim ! to let me know he's near
And thinking of me still.

THE DEMON SNOW-SHOES

The snow lies deep on hill and dale,
In rocky gulch and grassy vale :
The tiny, trickling, tumbling falls
Are frozen 'twixt their rocky walls
That grey and brown look silent down
Upon Kiandra's shrouded town.

The Eucumbene itself lies dead,
Fast frozen in its narrow bed ;
And distant sounds ring out quite near,
The crystal air is froze so clear ;
While to and fro the people go
In silent swiftness o'er the snow.

And, like a mighty gallows-frame,
The derrick in the New Chum claim
Hangs over where, despite the cold,
Strong miners seek the hidden gold,
And stiff and blue, half-frozen through,
The fickle dame of Fortune woo.

Far out, along a snow-capped range,
There rose a sound which echoed strange:
Where snow-emburthen'd branches hang,
And flashing icicles, there rang
A gay refrain, as towards the plain
Sped swiftly downward Carl the Dane.

His long, lithe snow-shoes sped along
In easy rhythm to his song;
Now slowly circling round the hill,
Now speeding downward with a will;
The crystals crash and blaze and flash
As o'er the frozen crust they dash.

Among the hills the first he shone
Of all who buckled snow-shoe on;
For though the mountain lads were fleet,
But one bold rival dare compete,
To veer and steer, devoid of fear,
Beside this strong-limbed mountaineer.

'Twas Davy Eccleston who dared
To cast the challenge: If Carl cared
On shoes to try their mutual pace,
Then let him enter for the race,
Which might be run by anyone—
A would-be champion. Carl said 'Done!'

But not alone in point of speed
They sought to gain an equal meed;
For in the narrow lists of love
Dave Eccleston had cast the glove:
Though both had prayed, the blushing maid
As yet no preference betrayed,

But played them off, as women will,
One 'gainst the other one, until—
A day when she was sorely pressed—
To loving neither youth confessed;
But did exclaim—the wily dame!—
'Who wins this race, I'll bear his name!'

Her words were ringing through Carl's head
As o'er the frozen crust he sped,
But suddenly became aware
That not alone he travelled there:
He sudden spied, with swinging stride,
A stranger gliding by his side:

The breezes o'er each shoulder tossed
His beard, bediamonded with frost;
His eyes flashed strangely, bushy-browed;
His breath hung round him like a shroud;
He never spoke, nor silence broke,
But by the Dane sped stroke for stroke.

'Old man ! I do not know your name,
Nor what you are, nor whence you came-
But this : if I but had your shoes
This champion race I ne'er could lose.
To call them mine, those shoes divine,
I'll gladly pay should you incline.'

The stranger merely bowed his head—
'The shoes are yours,' he gruffly said.
'I change with you, though at a loss ;
And in return I ask that cross
Which, while she sung, your mother hung
Around your neck when you were young.'

Carl hesitated when he heard
The price, but not for long demurred,
And gave the cross. With trembling haste
The shoes upon his feet were laced—
So long, yet light and polished bright—
His heart beat gladly at the sight.

Now, on the morning of the race,
Expectancy on every face,
They come the programme to fulfil
Upon the slope of Township Hill.
With silent feet the people meet,
While youths and maidens laughing greet.

High-piled the flashing snowdrifts lie,
And laugh to scorn the sun's dull eye,
That, glistening feebly, seems to say :
'When Summer comes you'll melt away !
You'll change your song when I grow strong :
I think so, though I may be wrong.'

The pistol flashed, and off they went
Like lightning on the steep descent.
Resistlessly down-swooping, swift
O'er the smooth face of polished drift
The racers strain with might and main ;
But in the lead flies Carl the Dane.

Behind him Davy did his best,
With hopeless eye and lip compressed
Beat by a snow-shoe length at most,
They flash and pass the winning-post.
The maiden said, 'I'll gladly wed
The youth who in this race has led.'

But where was he ? Still speeding fast,
Over the frozen stream he passed.
They watched his flying form until
They lost it over Sawyers' Hill ;
Nor saw it more : the people swore
The like they'd never seen before.

The way he scaled that steep ascent
Was quite against all precedent;
While others said he could but choose
To do it on those demon shoes.
They talked in vain, for Carl the Dane
Was never seen in flesh again.

But now the lonely diggers say
That sometimes at the close of day,
They see a misty wraith flash by,
With the faint echo of a cry.
It may be true; perhaps they do:
I doubt it much; but what say you?



A VALENTINE

The Bree was up ; the floods were out
  Around the hut of Culgo Jim :
The hand of God had broke the drought
  And filled the channels to the brim :
  The outline of the hut loomed dim
Among the shades of murmurous pine,
That eve of good Saint Valentine.

He watched, and to his sleepy gaze
  The dying embers of the fire,
Its yellow reds and pearly greys,
Made pictures of his younger days.
  Outside the waters mounted higher
Beneath a half-moon's sickly shine,
That eve of good Saint Valentine.

There, in the great slab fire-place
  The oak log, burnt away to coal,
Showed him the semblance of a face
  Framed in a golden aureole :
  Eyes, the clear windows of a soul—
Soul of a maid, who used to sign
Herself, 'Jim, dear, your Valentine.'



Lips, whose pink curves were made to bear
  Love's kisses, not to be the mock
Of grave-worms . . . Suddenly a whirr,
  And twelve loud strokes upon the clock ;
  Then at the door a gentle knock.
The collie dog began to whine
That morn of good Saint Valentine.

He opened ; by his heels the hound
  Sniffed at the night. 'Who comes, and why ?
What ? no one ! Hush ! was that a sound ?
  Methought I heard a human cry.
  Bah ! 'twas a curlew passing by
Out where the lignum bushes twine,
This morn of good Saint Valentine.

'What ails the dog ? Down, Stumpy, down!
  No ? Well, lead on, perchance a sheep
It is, poor brute, that fears to drown.
  Heavens ! how chill the waters creep !
  Why, Stumpy, do you splash and leap ?
'Tis but a foolish quest of thine,
  This morn of good Saint Valentine.



'Nay, not so foolish as I thought . . .
   Hark! 'mid those reeds a feeble scream!
Mother of God! a cradle—brought
   Down from some homestead up the stream!
   A white-robed baby! Do I dream?
No, 'tis that dear dead love of mine
Who sends me thus a Valentine!'



THE BOX-TREE'S LOVE

Long time beside the squatter's gate
A great grey Box-Tree, early, late,
Or shine or rain, in silence there
Had stood and watched the seasons fare:
Had seen the wind upon the plain
Caress the amber ears of grain;
The river burst its banks and come
Far past its belt of mighty gum:
Had seen the scarlet months of drought
Scourging the land with fiery knout;
And seasons ill and seasons good
Had alternated as they would.
The years were born, had grown and gone,
While suns had set and suns had shone;
Fierce flames had swept; chill waters drenched;–
That sturdy yeoman never blenched.

The Tree had watched the station grow—
The buildings rising row on row;
And from that point of vantage green,
Peering athwart its leafy screen,
The wondering soldier-birds had seen
The lumbering bullock-dray draw near,
Led by that swarthy pioneer
Who, gazing at the pleasant shade,
Was tempted, dropped his whip and stayed;
Brought there his wanderings to a close;
Unloosed the polished yokes and bows.

The bullocks, thankful for the boon,
Rang on their bells a merry tune:
The hobbles clinked; the horses grazed;
The snowy calico was raised;
The fire was lit; the fragrant tea
Drunk to a sunset melody
Tuned by the day before it died
To waken on Earth's other side.
There 'twas, beneath that Box-Tree's shade,
Fortune's foundation-stone was laid;
Cemented fast with toil and thrift,
Stone upon stone was laid to lift
A mighty arch, commemorate
Of one who reached the goal too late.
That white-haired pioneer with pride
Fitted the keystone; then he died:
His toil, his thrift, all to what boot?
He gave his life for Dead Sea fruit:

What did it boot his wide domain
Of feathered pine and sweeping plain,
Sand-ridge and turf? for he lay dead—
Another reigning in his stead.

His sons forgot him; but that Tree
Mourned for him long and silently,
And o'er the old man's lonely bier
Would, if he could, have dropped a tear.
One other being only shared
His grief: one other only cared:
And she was but a six years' maid—
His grandchild, who had watched him fade
In childish ignorance; and wept
Because the poor old grand-dad slept
So long a sleep, and never came
To smile upon her at her game,
Or tell her stories of the fays
And giants of the olden days.
She cared; and, as the seasons sped,
Linked by the memory of the dead,
They two, the Box-Tree and the Child,
Grew old in friendship; and she smiled,
Clapping her chubby hands with glee,
When for her pleasure that old Tree
Would shake his limbs, and let the light
Glance in a million sparkles bright
From off his polished olive cloak.
Then would the infant gently stroke

His massive bole, and laughing try
To count the patches of blue sky
Betwixt his leaves, or in the shades
That trembled on the grassy blades
Trace curious faces, till her head
Of gold grew heavy ; then he'd spread
His leaves to shield her, while he droned
A lullaby, so softly toned
It seemed but as the gentle sigh
Of Summer as she floated by ;
While bird and beast grew humble-voiced,
Seeing those golden ringlets moist
With dew of sleep. With one small hand
Grasping a grass-stem for a wand,
Titania slept. Nature nor spoke,
Nor dared to breathe, until she woke.

The years passed onward ; and perchance
The Tree had shot his tufted lance
Up to the sky a few slow feet ;
But one great limb grew down to greet
His mistress, who had ne'er declined
In love for him, though far behind
Her child-life lay, and now she stood
Waiting to welcome womanhood.
She loved him always as of old ;
Yet would his great roots grasp the mould,
And knotted branches grind and groan
To see her seek him not alone ;

For lovers came, and 'neath those boughs
With suave conversing sought to rouse
The slumbering passion in a breast
Whose coldness gave an added zest
To the pursuit;—but all in vain:
They spoke the once, nor came again—
Save one alone, who pressed his suit
(Man-like, he loved forbidden fruit)
And strove to change her Nay to Yea,
Until it fell upon a day
Once more he put his fate to proof
Standing beneath that olive roof;
And though her answer still was 'No'
He, half-incensed, refused to go,
Asking her, Had she heart for none
Because there was some other one
Who claimed it all?

Whereon the maid
Slipped off her ring and laughing said:
'Look you, my friend! here now I prove
The truth of it, and pledge my love!'—
And, poised on tiptoe, touched a limb
That bent to gratify her whim.
She slipped the golden circle on
A tiny branchlet, whence it shone
Mocking the suitor with its gleam—
A quaint dispersal of his dream.
She left the trinket there; but when
She came to take it back again

She found it not; nor—though she knelt
Upon the scented grass and felt
Among its roots, or parted sheaves
And peered among the shining leaves—
Could it be found. The Box-Tree held
Her troth for aye: his great form swelled
Until the bitter sap swept through
His veins and gave him youth anew.

With busy fingers, lank and thin,
The fatal Sisters sit and spin
Life's web, in gloomy musings wrapt,
Caring not, when a thread is snapt,
What harm its severance may do—
Whether it strangleth one or two.

Alas! there came an awful space
Of time wherein that sweet young face
Grew pale, its sharpened outline pressed
Deep in the pillow; for a guest,
Unsought, unbidden, forced his way
Into the chamber where she lay.
'Twas Death! . . . Outside the Box-Tree kept
Sad vigil, and at times he swept
His branches softly, as a thrill
Shot through his framework, boding ill
To her he loved; and so he bade
A bird fly ask her why she stayed.
The messenger, with glistening eye,
Returned, and said, 'The maid doth lie

Asleep. I tapped upon the pane:
She stirred not, so I tapped again.
She rests so silent on the bed,
Friend, that I fear the maid is dead;
For they have cut great sprays of bloom
And laid them all about the room.
The scent of roses fills the air:
They nestle in her breast and hair—
Like snowy mourners, scented, sweet,
Around her pillow and her feet.'
'Ah, me!' the Box-Tree, sighing, said;
'My love is dead! my love is dead!'
And shook his branches till each leaf
Chorused his agony of grief.

They bore the maiden forth, and laid
Her down to rest where she had played
Amid her piles of forest-spoil
In childhood: now the sun-caked soil
Closed over her. 'Ah!' sighed the Tree,
'Mark how my love doth come to me!'
He pushed brown rootlets down, and slid
Between the casket and its lid;
And bade them very gently creep
And wake the maiden from her sleep.
The tiny filaments slipped down
And plucked the lace upon her gown.
She stirred not when they ventured near
And softly whispered in her ear.

The silken fibres gently press
Upon her lips a chill caress:
They wreathe her waist: they brush her hair:
Under her pallid eyelids stare:
Yet all in vain; she will not wake—
Not even for her lover's sake.
The Box-Tree groaned aloud and cried:
'Ah, me! grim Death hath stole my bride.
Where is she hidden? Where hath flown
Her soul? I cannot bide alone;
But fain would follow.'

Then he called
And whispered to an ant that crawled
Upon a bough; and bade it seek
The white-ant colony and speak
A message where, beneath a dome
Of earth, the white queen hath her home.
She sent a mighty army forth
That fall upon the tree in wrath,
And, entering by a tiny hole,
Fill all the hollow of his bole;
Through all its pipes and crannies pour;
Sharp at his aching heart-strings tore;
Along his branches built a maze
Of sinuous, earthen-covered ways.
His smooth leaves shrunk, his sap ran dry:
The sunbeams laughing from the sky
Helped the ant workers at their toil,
Sucking all moisture from the soil.

Then on a night the wind swept down
And rustled 'mid the foliage brown.
The mighty framework creaked and groaned
In giant agony, and moaned—
Its wind-swept branches growing numb—
'I come, my love! my love, I come!'
A gust more furious than the rest
Struck the great Box-Tree's shivering crest:
The great bole snapped across its girth;
The forest monarch fell to earth
With such a mighty rush of sound
The settlers heard it miles around,
While upward through the windy night
That faithful lover's soul took flight.

The squatter smiled to see it fall:
He sent his men with wedge and maul,
Who split the tree; but found it good
For nothing more than kindling-wood.
They marvelled much to find a ring—
Asking themselves what chanced to bring
The golden circlet which they found
Clasping a branchlet firmly round.
Foolish and blind! they could not see
The faithfulness of that dead Tree.



A WAYSIDE QUEEN

She was born in the season of fire,
  When a mantle of murkiness lay
On the front of the crimson Destroyer:
And none knew the name of her sire
  But the woman; and she, ashen grey,
  In the fierce pangs of motherhood lay.

The skies were aflame at her coming
  With a marvellous message of ill;
And fear-stricken pinions were drumming
The hot, heavy air, whence the humming
  Of insects rose, sudden and shrill,
  As they fled from that hell-begirt hill.

Then the smoke-serpent writhed in her tresses
  The flame kissed her hard on the lips:
She smiled at their ardent caresses
As the wanton who smiles, but represses
  A lover's hot haste, and so slips
  From the arm that would girdle her hips.

Such the time of her coming and fashion:
  How long ere her day shall be sped,
And she goes to rekindle past passion
With languorous glances that flash on
  The long-straightened limbs of the dead,
  Where they lie in a winter-wet bed?

Where the wide waves of evergreen carry
  The song sad and soft of the surge
To feathered battalions that harry
The wizen-armed bloodwoods that tarry
  For ever, chained down on the verge
  Of a river that mutters a dirge.

'Tis a dirge for the dead men it mutters—
  Those weed-entwined strangers who lie
With the drift in the whirlpools and gutters—
Swoll'n hand or a garment that flutters
  Wan shreds as the waters rush by,
  And the flotsam, froth-freckled, rides high.

Is it there that she buries her lovers,
  This woman in scarlet and black?
Those swart *caballeros*, the drovers—
What sovranty set they above hers?
  Riding in by a drought-beset track
  To a fate which is worse than the rack.

A queen, no insignia she weareth
  Save the dark, lustrous crown of her hair
Her beauty the sceptre she beareth:
For men and their miseries careth
  As little as tigresses care
  For the quivering flesh that they tear.

She is sweet as white peppermint flowers,
  And harsh as red gum when it drips
From the heart of a hardwood that towers
Straight up: she hath marvellous powers
  To draw a man's soul through his lips
  With a kiss like the stinging of whips.

Warm nights, weighted down with wild laughter,
  When sex is unsexed and uncouth :
In the chorus that climbs to the rafter
No thought of the days to come after :
  She has little regret and less ruth
  As she tempts men to murder their youth.

Is she marked down as yet by the flaming
  Great eye of the Righter of Wrong ?
How long ere the Dreaded One, claiming
His due, shall make end of our shaming ?
  'How long, Mighty Father, how long ?'
  Is our wearisome burden of song.

FOGARTY'S GIN

A sweat-dripping horse and a half-naked myall,
And a message: 'Come out to the back of the run -
Be out at the stake-yards by rising of sun!
Ride hard and fail not! there's the devil to pay:
For the men from Monkyra have mustered the run—
Cows and calves, calves of ours, without ever a brand,
Fifty head, if there's one, on the camp there they
    stand.
Come out to the stake-yards, nor fail me, or by all
The saints they'll be drafted and driven away!'

Boot and saddle it was to the rolling of curses:
Snatching whip, snatching spurs, where they hung
    on the nail.
In his wrath old McIvor, head stockman, turned pale,
Spitting oaths with his head 'neath the flap of his
    saddle;
Taking up the last hole in the girth with his teeth;
Then a hand on the pommel, a quick catch of breath,
A lift of the body, a swing to the right—
And, ten half-broken nags with ten riders astraddle,
We sped, arrow-swift, for the heart of the night.

Thud of hoofs! thud of hearts! breath of man!
    breath of beast!
With M'Ivor in front, and the rest heel to flank,
So we rode in a bunch down the steep river bank,

Churning up the black tide in the shallows like yeast.
Through the coolabahs, out on the plain, it increased
Till we swung with the stride of the dingo-pack, swooping
On scent of weak mother with puny calf drooping.
Staring eyes, swaying forms o'er the saddle-bow stooping,
With the wind in our shirts, grip of knee, grip of rein,
Losing ground, falling back, creeping forward again.
Behind us the low line of dark coolabah;
Overhead a sky spangled by planet and star;
And to left, on our shoulder, the mighty Cross flaring,
While afoot the quick pulsing of hoof-beats disturbs
Moist silence of grasses and salty-leaved herbs.

Steering on by the stars, over hollow and crest;
Tingling eyes looking out through a curtain of tears
From the slap of the wind over forward-pricked ears,
Over forehead and nose stretching out for the west,
And into the face of the sombre night staring.
Threading in, threading out, through a maze of sand rises
That spring either side, loom a moment, then flee:
Dim hillocks of herbage and sun-blasted tree,
Till again a dark streak of far timber arises;
And anon, through the thick of a lignum swamp tearing,
Bare tendrils, back-springing, switch sharp on the knee.

Plain again ! and again, with the speed of the wind,
The long miles in front join their comrades behind ;
Then a sound in our ears like to far summer thunder
Or the booming of surf in a southerly gale ;
And we shouted aloud each to each in our wonder,
For we knew that those beasts must have come far
and far,
That they moaned as the breaking of waves on a bar.

But behold ! overhead the dark sky had grown pale,
With the azure-tinged paleness of newly-skimmed
milk,
And the dawn-spiders floated on threads of floss-
silk
As the guards of the sun drew aside the thick veil
And made ready to fling the dawn-portals asunder.
Still that sound swelled and rolled, thrilling deep on
the air,
Calling long, calling loud in the ear of each steed,
Bringing courage and strength in the moment of need,
And light'ning the weight of the burdens they bare.

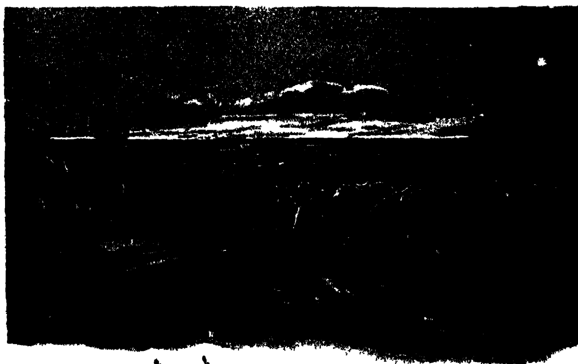
But that moment behind us upshot a red glare
As the sun swept the sky with a roseate sponge ;
And McIvor's blue roan gave a roar and a plunge,
A half-sob, and so fell, like an over-ripe pear.
Not a rein did we pull, not a stride did we stay,
Speeding onward and speeding ! For long we could
hear

Old Mac.'s maledictions ring loud in our rear
As we rode in hot haste from the incoming day.
Then all sudden and strangely we came face to face
With the lead of the cattle, and lo! our long race
Was run out; and we drew up the horses, all panting
In stress of the chase, and yet ready for more;
And our eager ears drank in that thunderous roar,
While we watched the red squadrons come over the levels
As if view-holloa'd by a pack of night-devils—
Cow and calf chasing heifer and lumbering steer,
With their grey, dripping nostrils, and eyes wide with fear,
As if Burgess's cob followed hard on their rear.

So we blocked them, and lo! the new sun laid a slanting
Red finger on one who rode over the plain,
Steed treading full slowly, head drooping, slack rein,
Turning often aside through the dew-laden grasses
To crop a sweet mouthful. We needed no glasses
To see it was Fogarty. Once and again,
And again did we hail—yet he ne'er looked round,
Neither made the least motion of hearing the sound.

Riding on like a man who should ride in his sleep,
Or as one in the web of some deep-woven charm,
So he came through the grass—his horse striding breast-deep—
With a woman held close in the crook of his arm;

And her hair, all unbound, rippled over his shoulder,
Dead black; and her brow, where the sweat of fierce
pain
Had dried, was brown-tinged as bronze is, but colder—
Ah, many times colder! and as he pulled rein,
He unwrapped saddle-blanket in which he had rolled
her,
And lo! the gay sunlight lit ominous stain,
Where a murderous bullet had torn a blue vein
And let out her life in a warm crimson rain.



Then gently he laid his sad load on the ground,
And with sorrowing glances we gathered around.
Then he turned to the west, with his eyes all aflame,
With his brawny fists raised, calling witness from
Heaven—

On his shoulder and flank the dark blood of the slain—
And he hurled his curse back on the place whence he came:
A loud curse, and a threat that he yet would stand even
With those of Monkyra who wrought this foul shame—
Though, to tell the God's truth, we'd have done just the same
In their place, and have reckoned it nothing but right:
For the black girl and Fogarty quietly crept
On the Monkyra men in the dead of the night;
And it happened the watchman was weary and slept,
So the gin, who no doubt was a game little pullet,
Slipped in, and brought both their night horses away,
While Fogarty started the cattle that lay
On the camp; and the trick was so bold it succeeded;
For the Monkyra men, when their cattle stampeded,
Had nothing to send in pursuit but a bullet.
Yet *that* was as much as the little gin needed:
She made no great fuss, though, nor murmured nor cried;
Only rode on the right of her lord till she died.
Her life ended well—nothing scamped or by halves:
Where she went who can tell? But *we* branded the calves.



A SONG FROM A SANDHILL

Drip, drip, drip! It tinkles on the fly—
The pitiless outpouring of an overburdened sky·
Each drooping frond of pine has got a jewel at its tip—
First a twinkle, then a sprinkle, and a drip, drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip! They must be shearing up on high.
Can't you see the snowy fleeces that are rolling, rolling by?
How many bales, I wonder, are they branding to the clip?
P'r'aps the Boss is keeping tally with this drip, drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip! while the sodden branches sigh:
The jovial jackass dare not laugh for fear that he should cry:
The merry magpie's melody is frozen on his lip;
He glowers at the showers, with their drip, drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip ! and one's 'nap' is far from dry :
'Tis hard to keep the water out, however one may try :
I'd sell myself to Satan for three fingers of a nip :
There's cramps and vile rheumatics in that drip, drip,
drip.

Pat, pat, pat ! how it patters on the land !
'Tis certainly consoling to be camped upon the sand :
There's naught but mud and water over yonder on
the flat,
Where the spots of rain are splashing with their
pat, pat, pat.

Rain, rain, rain ! and the day is nearly done :
I wonder shall we see another rising of the sun ?
Has the sky shut down and stifled him ; or will he
come again
And stop the cursed clatter of this rain, rain, rain ?

Drop, drop, drop ! monotonous as Life,
With now and then a western breeze that cuts one
like a knife :
Sputter on the fire : is it never going to stop ?
Has the weather-clerk gone crazy, with his drop,
drop, drop ?

Drip, drip, drip ! the squatter wouldn't say
'Thank God !' so earnestly if he were camped in it
to-day.
'Tis in at last : I knew it ! there's a pool about my hip :
Oh, 'tis maddening and sadd'ning, with its drip, drip,
drip !



THE BABES IN THE BUSH

Dozens of damp little curls;
One little short upper lip;
Two rows of teeth like diminutive pearls;
Eyes clear and grey as the creek where it swirls
Over the ledges—that's Tip!
With a skip!—
A perfectly hopeless young nip!

Smudge on the tip of his nose ;
  Mischievous glance of a Puck ;
Heart just as big as the rents in his clothes ;
Lungs like a locust and cheeks like a rose ;—
  Total it !—there you have Tuck !
        And bad luck
  To the man who would question his pluck !

School is all over at last—
  School with its pothooks and strokes :
Homeward they toddle, but who could go fast ?—
So many wonderful things to be passed—
  Froggie, for instance, who croaks
        'Neath the oaks
  By the creek where the watercress soaks.

Sandpipers dance on the bars ;
  Swallows, white-throated and fleet,
Dip thirsty beaks in the stream as they pass ;
Smooth water-beetles that twinkle like stars
  Watch the gay dragon-flies greet.
        Hark how sweet
  Is the pipe of the tiny pee-weet !

Near, too, the earth is all torn :
  Strong, willing workers have thrown
Great heaps of tailings, smooth-polished and worn,
Round the mysterious caverns that yawn—
  Stacks of the snowy quartz stone,
        Grass-grown
  Piles of the Earth's dry bone.

Grasshoppers chirp on the brace;
  Briars drop berries blood-red
Into the mouldering void of the race;
Green mosses flourish on cutting and face;
  Children speak softly, with dread,
    When they tread
  In this desolate place of the dead.

'Tum on!' said Tip, 'here's a nest!'
  Looking behind as he ran.
'No,' said his brother, expanding his chest,
'I like to play at pro'pectin' the best'—
  Thumping a rusty old pan;
    Then began
  To wash up a dish like a man.

'Tum on! here's four little eggs!
  Do tum!'—he whimpers his lip:
A-tremble his eyes, wet by tears as he begs,
And sharp briars are scratching his legs.
  A branch strikes his face like a whip;
    Then a slip—
  And a shaft swallows poor little Tip!

Peering and catching his breath,
  Tuck felt his little heart swell:
Nothing at all could he see underneath—
P'r'aps poor old Tippy had gone to his death.
  Would it hurt *him* if he fell?
    Who could tell
  The depth of that horrible well?

'Tippy! oh, Tip! are you dead?' . . .
Never a sound or a sigh!
Tuck held his breath, his heart heavy as lead:
Then: 'Tuck! where are you? I've hurted my head!'
Came up the quav'ring reply;
And a cry:
'Oh, Tuck! don't go 'way, or I'll die!

'Tuck! it's so dark; I'm afraid!' . . .
He drew down his eyebrows and frowned
Up the creek, down the creek, somewhat dismayed.
Miles to go home; but, again, if he stayed,
How would they ever be found
Underground
In that cavern that swallowed all sound?

'Tuck, I'm all covered with blood!'
Sobbed the small voice without cess.
'Why don't you help me up out of the mud?'
Tuck foraged out a long length of pine wood;
Stripped off his little print dress,
And—just guess!
Rigged a white flag of distress!

Truly the depth was not great—
That, though, the babe did not know;
Lowering himself till the whole of his weight
Hung on the fingers that clutched the blue slate . . .
'Please God!' . . . he let himself go;
And I trow
That angel hands caught him below.'

Never a scratch or a mark!
  No, and not even a tear!
Little hands feeling their way through the dark
What if that other should be stiff and stark?
  'Here I am, Tippy! quite near—
      Oh, dear!'
  Then came the answer: 'I'm here!'

Crouched in the mouth of a drive,
  Tippy sobbed out his delight—
Not so much hurt, after all—quite alive:
Almost convinced that no harm could arrive
  Now that Tuck's arms clasped him tight.
      Then the light
  Died slowly, and lo! it was Night.

Above—the flag blows to the air:
  Sad parents seek vainly and weep:
There are lights 'mid the thistles, and cries of despair:
A rifle cracks loudly, and bonfires glare . . .
  Below—where the blind creatures creep,
      Hidden deep,
  Two pretty babes smile in their sleep.

THE DIGGER'S SONG

Scrape the bottom of the hole: gather up the stuff!
  Fossick in the crannies, lest you leave a grain behind!
Just another shovelful and that'll be enough—
  Now we'll take it to the bank and see what we can find . . .
    Give the dish a twirl around!
    Let the water swirl around!
Gently let it circulate—there's music in the swish
    And the tinkle of the gravel,
    As the pebbles quickly travel
Around in merry circles on the bottom of the dish.

Ah, if man could wash his life—if he only could!
  Panning off the evil deeds, keeping but the good:
What a mighty lot of diggers' dishes would be sold!
  Though I fear the heap of tailings would be greater than the gold . . .
    Give the dish a twirl around!
    Let the water swirl around!
Man's the sport of circumstance however he may wish:
    Fortune! are you there now?
    Answer to my prayer now—
Drop a half-ounce nugget in the bottom of the dish.

Gently let the water lap! Keep the corners dry!
  That's about the place the gold will generally stay.
What was that bright particle that just then caught my eye?
  I fear me by the look of things 'twas only yellow clay . . .
    Just another twirl around!
    Let the water swirl around!
That's the way we rob the river of its golden fish . . .
    What's that? . . . Can't we snare a one?
    Don't say that there's ne'er a one! . . .
Bah! there's not a colour in the bottom of the dish!

HOW POLLY PAID FOR HER KEEP

Do I know Polly Brown? Do I know her? Why,
 damme!
You might as well ask if I know my own name!
It's a wonder you never heard tell of old Sammy,
Her father, my mate in the Crackenback claim.

He asks if I know little Poll! Why, I nursed her
As often, I reckon, as old Mother Brown
When they lived at the Flats, and old Sam went a
 burster
In Chinaman's Gully, and dropped every crown.

My golden-haired mate, ever brimful of folly
And childish conceit, and yet ready to rest
Contented beside me: 'twas I who taught Polly
To handle four horses along with the best.

'Twas funny to hear the small fairy discoursing
Of horses and drivers! I'll swear that she knew
Every one of the nags that I drove to the Crossing—
Their voices, and paces, and pedigrees too.

She got a strange whim in her golden-haired noddle
That a driver's high seat was a kind of a throne:
I've taken her up there before she could toddle,
And she'd talk to the nags in a tongue of her own.

Then old Mother Brown got the horrors around her:
(I think it was pineapple rum drove her daft)
She cleared out one night, and next morning they
found her,
A mummified mass, in a forty-foot shaft.

And Sammy? Well, Sammy was wailing and weeping,
And raving, and raising the devil's own row:
He was only too glad to give into our keeping
His motherless babe—we'd have kept her till now;

But Jimmy Maloney thought proper to court her:
Among all the lasses he loved but this one:
She's no longer Polly, our golden-haired daughter;
She's Mrs. Maloney, of Packsaddle Run.

Our little girl Polly's no end of a swell (you
Must know Jimmy shears fifty thousand odd sheep)—
But I'm clean off the track: I was going to tell you
The way in which Polly paid us for her keep.

It was this way: My wife's living in Tumbarumba,
And I'm down at Germanton yards, for a sale,
Inspecting coach-horses (I wanted a number)
When they flashed down a message that made me
turn pale.

'Twas from Polly, to say that the old wife had fallen
Down-stairs, and in falling had fractured a bone:
There was no doctor nearer than Tumut to call on,
So she and the blacksmith had set it alone.

They'd have to come down by the coach in the
morning,
As one of the two buggy ponies was lame:
Would I see the old doctor, and give him fair warning
To keep himself decently straight till they came?

I was making good money those times, and a fiver
Per week was the wages my deputy got;
A good, honest worker, an out-and-out driver—
But, like all the rest, a most terrible sot.

So, just on this morning—which made it more sinful—
With my women on board, the unprincipled skunk
Hung round all the bars till he loaded a skinful
Of grog, and then started his journey—dead drunk!

Drunk! with my loved ones on board—drunk as Chloe!
He might have got right by the end of the trip
Had he rested contented and quiet; but no, he
Must pull up at Rosewood, for one other nip.

That finished him off quick, and there he sat, dozing
Like an owl on his perch, half awake, half asleep,
Till a lurch of the coach came, when, suddenly losing
His balance, he fell to earth all of a heap;

While the coach, with its four frightened horses,
went sailing
Downhill to perdition and Carabost break—
Four galloping devils, with reins loosely trailing,
And passengers falling all roads in their wake.

Two bagmen, who sat on the box, jumped together
And found a soft bed in the mud of the drain ;
The barmaid from Murphy's fell light as a feather—
I think she got off with a bit of a sprain ;

While the jock, with his nerves most decidedly
shaken,
Made straight for the door, never wasting his
breath
In farewell apologies : basely forsaken,
My wife and Poll Brown sat alone with grim
Death.

While the coach thundered downward, my wife fell
a-praying ;
But Poll in a fix, now, is dashed hard to beat :
She picked up her skirts, scrambled over the swaying
High roof of the coach, till she lit on the seat,

And there looked around. In her hand was a pretty,
Frail thing made of laces, with which a girl strives
To save her complexion when down in the city—
A lace parasol ! yet it saved both their lives.

Oh, Polly was game, you may bet your last dollar !
She leans on the splashboard, and stretches and
strains
With her parasol, down by the off-sider's collar,
Until she contrives to catch hold of the reins.

They lay quite secure in the crook of the handle,
She clutched them—the parasol fell underneath.
I tell you no girl ever *could* hold a candle
To Poll, as she hung back and clenched her white teeth.



. . .

The bolters sped downward, with nostrils distended,
She *must* get a pull on them ere they should reach
The fence on the hill, where the road had been mended . . .
The blocks bit the wheels with a scroop and a screech;

The little blue veins in her arms swelled and blackened;
The reins were like fiddle-strings stretched in her grip;
When the break hove in sight, the mad gallop had slackened:
She had done it, by God! they were under the whip.

They still had the pace on; but Polly was able
To steer 'twixt the fences with never a graze:
They flashed past the change, where the groom at the stable
Just stood with his mouth open, dumb with amaze.

On the level she turned them—the best bit of driving
That ever was done on this side of the range—
And trotted them back up the hill-side, arriving
With not a strap broken in front of the change.

And the wife? Well, she prayed to the Lord till she fainted:
I reckon He answered her prayers: all the same,
He *must* have helped Polly. It's curious now, ain't it?
To see a thin slip of a girl be so game.

Did I summons the driver? I had no occasion
The coroner came with his jury instead,
Who found that he died from a serious abrasion—
Both wheels of the coach had gone over his head.

AN ALLEGORY

The fight was over, and the battle won.
A soldier, who beneath his chieftain's eye
Had done a mighty deed and done it well,
And done it as the world will have it done—
A stab, a curse, some quick play of the butt,
Two skulls cracked crosswise, *but the colours saved*—
Proud of his wounds, proud of the promised cross,
Turned to his rear-rank man, who on his gun
Leant heavily apart. 'Ho, friend!' he called,
'You did not fight then: were you left behind?
I saw you not.' The other turned and showed
A gaping, red-lipped wound upon his breast.
'Ah,' said he sadly, 'I was in the smoke!'
Threw up his arms, shivered, and fell and died.

KITTY McCRAE

The western sun, ere he sought his lair,
   Skimmed the treetops, and, glancing thence,
Rested awhile on the curling hair
   Of Kitty McCrae, by the boundary fence:
Her eyes looked anxious; her cheeks were pale;
For father was two hours late with the mail.

Never before had he been so late;
   And Kitty wondered and wished him back,
Leaning athwart the big swing gate
   That opens out on the bridle-track—
A tortuous path that sidles down
From the single street of a mining town.

With her raven curls and her saucy smile—
   Dark eyes that glow with a changeful light,
Tenderly trembling all the while
   Like a brace of stars on the breast of Night—
Where could you find in the light of day
A bonnier lass than Kitty McCrae?

Born in the saddle, this girl could ride
   Like the fearless Queen of the silver bow;
And nothing that ever was lapped in hide
   Could frighten Kitty McCrae, I trow.
She would wheel a mob in the hour of need
If the Devil himself were in the lead.

But now, in the shadows' deepening
  When the last sun-spark has ceased to burn,
Afar she catches the sullen ring
  Of horse-hoofs swinging around the turn;
Then painfully down the narrow trail
Comes Alec McCrae with the Greytown mail.

'The fever-and-ague, my girl,' he said—
  ''Twas all I got on that northern trip:
When it left me then I was well-nigh dead—
  Has got me fast in its iron grip;
And I'd rather rot in the nearest gaol
Than ride to-night with the Greytown mail.

'At Golden Gully they heard to-day—
  'Twas a common topic about the town—
That the Mulligan Gang were around this way.
  They wouldn't despatch the gold-dust down;
And Brown, the manager, said he thought
'Twere wise to wait for a strong escort.

'I rode the leaders; the other nags
  I left with the coach at the 'Travellers' Rest.'
Kitty, my lass, you must take the bags—
  Postboy, I reckon's about the best;
'Tis dark, I know, but he'll never fail
To take you down with the Greytown mail.'

It needed no further voice to urge
  This dutiful daughter to eager haste ;
She donned the habit of rough blue serge
  That draped itself from her slender waist ;
And Postboy stood by the stockyard rail
While she mounted behind the Greytown mail.

Dark points, the rest of him iron-grey,
  Boasting no strain of expensive blood,
Down steepest hill he could pick his way,
  And never was baulked by a winter flood—
Strong as a lion, hard as a nail,
Was the horse that carried the Greytown mail.

A nag that really seemed to be
  Fit for a hundred miles at a push :
With the old Monaro pedigree—
  By 'Furious Riding,' out of 'The Bush' ;
For he was run from a mountain mob
By Brian O'Flynn and Dusty Bob.

And Postboy's bosom was filled with pride
  As he felt the form of his mistress sway,
In its easy grace, to his swinging stride
  As he dashed along down the narrow way.
No prettier Mercury, I'll go bail,
Than Kitty e'er carried a Government mail.

Leaving the slope of O'Connor's Hill,
  They merrily scattered the drops of dew
In the spanning of many a tiny rill
  Whose bubbling waters were hid from view :
In quick-beat time to the curlew's wail
Rode Kitty McCrae, with the Greytown mail.

Sidling the Range by a narrow path
  Where towering mountain-ash trees grow,
And a slip meant more than an icy bath
  In the tumbling waters that foamed below ;
Through the white fog filling each silent vale
Rode Kitty McCrae with the Greytown mail.

The forest shadows became less dense :
  They fairly flew down the river fall :
When out from the shade of an old brush-fence
  Stepped three armed men with a sudden call.
Sharp and stern came the well-known hail :
'Stand ! for we want the Greytown mail !'

Postboy swerved with a mighty bound
  As an outlaw clung to his bridle rein :
A hoof-stroke flattened him to the ground
  With a curse that was half a cry of pain ;
While Kitty, trembling and rather pale,
Rode for life and the Greytown mail.

To save the bags was her only thought
   As she bent to the whistle of angry lead
That followed the flash and the sharp report;
   But, 'Oh, you cowards!' was all she said.
Fast through the storm of leaden hail
Kitty rode on with the Greytown mail.

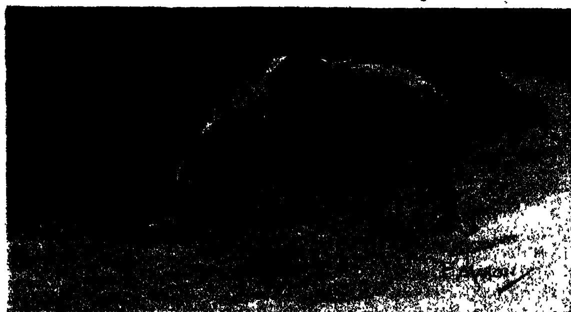
Safe? Ah, no! for a tiny stream
   On Postboy's coat left its crimson mark.
She still rode on; but 'twas in a dream,
   Through lands where shadows fell drear and dark
Like a wounded sea-bird before the gale
Fled Kitty McCrae with the Greytown mail.

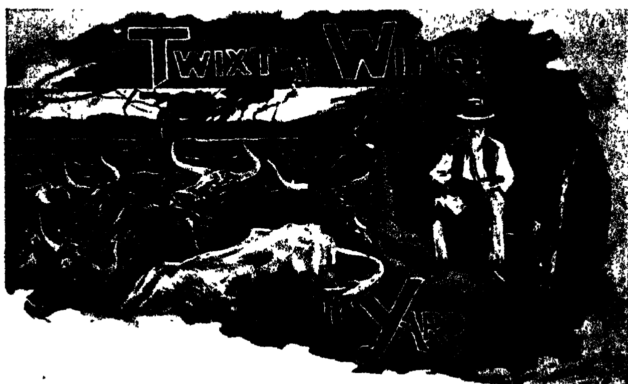
And ever the crimson life-stream drips—
   For every hoof-stroke a drop of blood—
From feeble fingers the bridle slips
   As down the Warrigal Flat they scud;
And just where the Redbank workings lie
She reels and falls with a feeble cry.

The old horse slackened his racing pace
   When he found the saddle his only load,
And laid his nose to the pretty face
   White upturned in the dusty road;
Like a gathered rose in the heat of day,
So drooped and faded Kitty McCrae.

Did Postboy stay by the dead girl's side?
  Not he! relieved of her feather-weight,
He woke the echoes with measured stride,
  Galloping up to the postal gate—
Blood, dust, and sweat from head to tail,
A riderless horse with the Greytown mail!

And now a river-oak, drooping, weeps
  In ceaseless sorrow above the grave
Down on the flat where Kitty sleeps,
  Hushed by the river's lapping wave—
That ever tells to the trees the tale
Of how she rode with the Greytown mail.





'TWIXT THE WINGS OF THE YARD

Hear the loud swell of it, mighty pell-mell of it!
  Thousands of voices all blent into one:
See 'hell for leather' now trooping together, now
  Down the long slope of the range at a run!
Dust in the wake of 'em: see the wild break of 'em!
  Spear-horned and curly, red, spotted and starred:
See the lads bringing 'em, blocking 'em, ringing 'em,
  Fetching 'em up to the wings of the yard!

Mark that red leader now : what a fine bleeder now !
  Twelve hundred at least if he weighs half a pound !
None go ahead of him. Mark the proud tread of him !
  See how he bellows and paws at the ground !
Watch the mad rush of 'em! raging and crush of 'em!
  See when they struck how the corner-post jarred !
What a mad chasing and wheeling and racing and
  Turbulent talk 'twixt the wings of the yard !

Harry and Teddy, there ! let 'em go steady there !
  Some of you youngsters will surely get pinned.
What am I saying ? I've had my last day in
  The saddle : I might as well talk to the wind.
Why should I grieve at all ? soon I must leave it all —
  Leave it for ever ; and yet it seems hard
That I should be lingering here 'stead of fingering
  Handle of whip 'twixt the wings of the yard.

Hear the loud crack of the whips on the back of the
  Obstinate weaners who will not go in !—
Sharp fusilade of it till, half afraid of it,
  Echo herself shuts her ears at the din.
They'll say when it's over now that I'm in clover now—
  Happy old pensioner ! yet it seems hard,
E'en on the brink of the grave, when I think of the
  Times out of mind that I rode to that yard.

Hark to the row at the rails! there's a cow at the
  Charge: how she laughs all their lashes to scorn!
Mark how she ran ag'in little Tom Flanagan!
  Lucky for him that it wasn't her horn:
He'd make no joke of it had he a poke of it.
  There she comes back! but he's put on his guard:
Greenhide descending now, sharp reports blending now,
  Flogging her back up the wings of the yard.

The breeze brings their bellowing, soft'ning it, mellowing,
  Till it sounds like a spent giant in pain—
Steals up the valley on, sounding a rally on
  Sonorous hills that return it again.
Useless my whining now! useless repining now!
  'Twon't make me any less battered and scarred:
Though I've grown grey at it—oh, for a day at it!
  Oh, for an hour 'twixt the wings of the yard!

Oh, how I yearn for those times! how I burn for those
  Days when my weapons, the whip and the spur,
The double-reined bridle, were not hanging idle! . . .
  But I'm old, and as useless as Stumpy—that cur:
No good for heeling now, he has a feeling now
  Not unlike mine—that it's woefully hard
We should be lying here, groaning and sighing here,
  Watching the cattle come up to the yard.

Life has no salt in it. See how I halt in it!—
  I, who once rode with the first of the flight—
Watching and waiting now, feebly debating now
  Whether the close will bring darkness or light;
Half my time pondering, back through life wandering,
  Groaning to see how that life has been marred—
Seeing the blots in it, all the bad spots in it,
  Mustering, bringing past sins to the yard.

Shall I be able to show a clean waybill to
  God, when he rounds up and drafts off his own—
When, at the mustering, millions of clustering
  Souls come to judgement before the white throne?
Is the Lord's hand on me? Have I his brand on me?
  When I go up will the passage be barred?
Am I a chosen one? must the gates close on one?
  Shall I be left 'twixt the wings of his yard?

A SONG

I've a kiss from a warmer lover
  Than maiden of earth can be:
She blew it up to the skies above her,
  And now it has come to me:
From the far-away it has come to-day
  With a breath of the old salt sea.

She lay and laughed on a lazy billow,
  Far away on the deep,
Who had gathered the froth for my lady's pillow—
  Gathered a sparkling heap;
And the ocean's cry was the lullaby
  That cradled my love to sleep.

Far away on the blue Pacific
  There doth my lady roam,
That is oft-times gay, but as oft terrific:
  Her jewels are beads of foam:
In a coral cave, where a blue-green wave
  Keeps guard, is my lady's home.

She claps her hands, and her henchman hurries
  West on the sunset sheen :
'Tis he who comes when a mist-wrack scurries,
  Skirting the deep ravine ;
And my heart is stirred by the loving word
  He carries me from my queen.

A drop distilled from a lotos flower—
  That is the magic key
To unlock the cage, and my soul has power
  To gather itself and flee,
At my love's behest, where she waits her guest
  In a palace beneath the sea.

Joy is ours that is almost anguish :
  Pain that is almost sweet :
We kiss ; and the ocean creatures languish
  Jealously at our feet :
The sight grows dim, and the senses swim
  When I and my lady greet.

There to dream, while the soul is swooning
  Under a woven spell—
Hushed to sleep by her tender crooning
  Learnt from the ocean swell—
There to rest on her jewelled breast,
  To love and be loved as well !

SKEETA

Our Skeeta was married! our Skeeta! the tomboy and pet of the place—
No more as a maiden we'd greet her; no more would her pert little face
Light up the chill gloom of the parlour; no more would her deft little hands
Serve drinks to the travel-stained caller on his way to more southerly lands:
No more would she chaff the rough drovers and send them away with a smile;
No more would she madden her lovers demurely, with womanish guile—
The 'prince' from the great Never Never, with light touch of lips and of hand
Had come, and enslaved her for ever—a potentate bearded and tanned
From the land where the white mirage dances its dance of death over the plains,
With the glow of the sun in his glances, the lust of the West in his veins:

His talk of wild cattle and rushes—a curious slang
on his lips—
Of narrow escapes and of brushes with niggers on
perilous trips;
A supple-thewed, desert-bred rover, with naught to
commend him but this:
That he was her idol, her lover, who'd fettered her
heart with a kiss.

They were wed—and he took her to Warren, where
she in her love was content;
But town-life to him was too foreign, so back to the
droving he went:
A man away down on the border of Vic. bought
some cattle from Cobb,
And gave Harry Parker the order to go to the
Gulf for the mob:
And he went, for he held her love cheaper than his
wish to re-live the old life—
Or his reason might yet have been deeper—*I* called it
deserting his wife!

Then one morning his horses were mustered; the
start on the journey was made;—
A clatter, an oath through the dust heard, was the
last of the long cavalcade.
As we stood by the stockyard assembled—poor child!
how she strove to be brave!
But yet I could see how she trembled at the careless
farewell that he gave.

We brought her back home on the morrow; but none
of us ever may learn
Of the fight that she fought to keep sorrow at bay
till her husband's return.
Her girlhood had gone, and in going had left her in
bitterness steeped:
How gladsome and gay was the sowing! how bitter
the crop that she reaped!
Her girlhood had gone, and had left her a woman in
all but in years—
Of laughter and joy had bereft her, and brought in
their place nought but tears.

Yet still, as the months passed, a treasure was
brought her by Love, ere he fled;
And garments of infantile measure she fashioned
with needle and thread:
She fashioned with linen and laces and ribbons a
nest for her bird,
While colour returned to her face as the bud of
maternity stirred.
It blossomed and died: we arrayed it in all its soft
splendour of white,
And sorrowing took it and laid it in the earth
whence it sprung, out of sight:
She wept not at all—only whitened—as Death, in
his pitiless quest,
Leant over her pillow and tightened the throat of the
child at her breast.

She wept not: her soul was too tired; for waiting is
harrowing work;
And then I bethought me and wired away to the
agents in Bourke.
'Twas little enough I could glean there; 'twas little
enough that they knew:
They answered he hadn't been seen there, but might
in a week—perchance two.

She wept not at all—only whitened with staring too
long at the night:
There was only one time when she brightened—that
time when red dust hove in sight,
And settled and hung on the backs of the cattle, and
altered their spots,
While the horses swept up, with their packs of blue
blankets and jingling pint-pots.
She always was set upon meeting those boisterous
cattle-men, lest
Her husband had sent her a greeting by one of them,
in from the West.
Not one of them ever owned to him, or seemed to
remember the name:
(The truth was they all of them knew him, but
wouldn't tell *her* of his shame)
But never, though long time she waited, did her faith
in the faithless grow weak;
And each time the outer door grated an eager flush
sprang to her cheek:

'Twasn't him, and it died with a flicker; and then
what I'd long dreaded came:
I was serving two drovers with liquor when one of
them mentioned his name.
'Oh, yes!' said the other one, winking, 'on the
Paroo I saw him: he'd been
In Eulo a fortnight then, drinking, and driving
about with "The Queen,"
While the bullocks were going to glory, and his
billet was not worth a damn!'
I told him to cut short the story, as I pulled-to the
door with a slam.
Too late! for the words were loud-spoken, and Skeeta
was out in the hall:
Then I knew that a girl's heart was broken, as I
heard a low cry and a fall.

And then came a day when the doctor went home,
for the truth was avowed;
And I knew that my hands, which had rocked her in
childhood, would fashion her shroud:
I knew we should tenderly carry and lay her where
many more lie—
Ah, why will the girls love and marry, when men are
not worthy?—ah, why?
She lay there a-dying, our Skeeta: not e'en did she
stir at my kiss:
In the next world, perchance, we may greet her; but
never, ah, never, in this!

Like the last breath of air in a gully, that sighs as
the sun slowly dips,
To the knell of a heart beating dully her soul
struggled out on her lips;
But she lifted great eyelids and pallid, while once
more beneath them there glowed
The fire of old Love, as she rallied at sound of hoofs
out on the road.
They rang sharp and clear on the metal: they ceased
at the gate in the lane:
A pause!—and we heard the beats settle in long,
swinging cadence again.
With a rattle, a rush, and a clatter the rider came
down by the store,
And neared us; but what did it matter? he never
pulled rein at the door;
But over the brow of the hill he sped on with a
low muffled roll—
'Twas only young Smith on his filly: he passed—and
so too did her soul.

Weeks after, I went down one morning to trim the
white rose that had grown
And clasped, with its tender adorning, the plain
little cross of white stone.
In the lane dusty drovers were wheeling dull cattle,
with turbulent sound;
But I paused as I saw a man kneeling, with his
forehead pressed low on the mound.

Already he'd heard me approaching; and slowly I
saw him up-rise
And move away, sullenly slouching his cabbage-
tree over his eyes.
I never said anything to him as he mounted his horse
at the gate:
He didn't know me; but I knew him—the husband
who came back too late!



ON THE BOUNDARY

I love the ancient boundary-fence—
  That mouldering chock-and-log :
When I go ride the boundary
  I let the old horse jog,
And take his pleasure in and out
  Where sandalwood grows dense,
And tender pines clasp hands across
  The log that tops the fence.

'Tis pleasant on the boundary-fence
  These sultry summer days ;
A mile away, outside the scrub,
  The plain is all ablaze.
The sheep are panting on the camps—
  The heat is so intense ;
But here the shade is cool and sweet
  Along the boundary-fence.

I love to loaf along the fence :
  So does my collie dog :
He often finds a spotted cat
  Hid in a hollow log.
He's very near as old as I
  And ought to have more sense—
I've hammered him so many times
  Along the boundary-fence.

My mother says that boundary-fence
  Must surely be bewitched ;
The old man says that through that fence
  The neighbours are enriched ;
It's always down, and through the gaps
  Our stock all get them hence—
It takes me half my time to watch
  The doings of that fence.

But should you seek the reason
  You won't travel very far :
'Tis hid a mile away among
  The murmuring belar :
The Jones's block joins on to ours,
  And so, in consequence,
It's part of Polly's work to ride
  Their side the boundary-fence.

BABS MALONE

Now the squatters and the cockies,
Shearers, trainers, and their jockeys
Had gathered them together for a meeting on the flat;
They had mustered all their forces,
Owners brought their fastest horses,
Monaro-bred—I couldn't give them greater praise than that.

'Twas a lovely day in Summer—
What the blacksmith called a hummer—
The swelling ears of wheat and oats had lost their tender green,
And breezes made them shiver,
Trending westward to the river—
The river of the golden sands, the moaning Eucumbene.

If you cared to take the trouble
You could watch the misty double,
The shadow of the flying clouds that skimmed the Boogong's brow,

Throwing light and shade incessant
On the Bull Peaks' ragged crescent,
Upon whose gloomy forehead lay a patch of winter's snow.

Idly watching for the starting
Of the race that he had part in,
Old Gaylad stood and champed his bit, his weight about nine stone;
His owner stood beside him,
Who was also going to ride him—
A shearer from Gegederick, whose name was Ned Malone.



But Gaylad felt disgusted,
For his joints were fairly rusted:
He longed to feel the pressure of the jockey on his back;

And he felt that for a pin he'd
Join his mates, who loudly whinnied
For him to go and meet them at the post upon the track.

From among the waiting cattle
Came the sound of childish prattle,
And the wife brought up their babe to kiss his father for good luck.
Said Malone: 'When I am seated
On old Gaylad, and am treated
With fairish play, I'll bet we never finish in the ruck.'

But the babe was not contented,
Though his pinafore was scented
With oranges and sticky from his lollies, for he cried—
This gallant little laddy,
As he toddled to his daddy,
And raised his arms imploringly—'Pease dad! div Babs a wide!'

Then the father, how he chuckled
For the pride of it! and buckled
The surcingle, and placed the babe astride the racing pad:
He did it, though he oughtn't;
And by pure good luck he shortened
The stirrups, and adjusted them to suit the tiny lad,

Who was seemingly delighted :
Not a little bit affrighted,
He sat and twined a chubby hand among the horse's mane :
His whip was in the other ;
But all suddenly the mother
Shrieked, 'Take him off!' and then the field came thund'ring down the plain !



'Twas the Handicap was coming,
And the music of their drumming
Beat dull upon the turf that in its summer coat was dressed:
The racehorse reared and started;
Then the flimsy bridle parted,
And Gaylad, bearing featherweight, was striding with the rest!

That scene cannot be painted—
How the poor young mother fainted!
How the father drove his spurs into the nearest saddle-horse!
What to do he had no notion;
For you'd easier turn the ocean
Than stop the Handicap that then was half-way round the course.

On the bookies at their yelling,
On the cheap-jacks at their selling,
On the crowd there fell a silence as the squadron passed the stand;
Gayest colours flashing brightly,
And the baby clinging tightly,
A wisp of Gaylad's mane still twisted in his little hand.

Not a thought had he of falling,
Though his little legs were galling,
And the wind blew out his curls behind him in a golden stream;

Though the motion made him dizzy,
Yet his baby brain was busy :
For hadn't he at length attained the substance of his dream ?

He was now a jockey *really !*
And he saw his duty clearly
To do his best to win and justify his father's pride ;
So he clicked his tongue to Gaylad,
Whispering softly, 'Get away, lad !' . . .
The old horse cocked an ear and put six inches on his stride.

Then the jockeys who were tailing
Saw a big bay horse come sailing
Through the midst of them with nothing but a baby on his back ;
And this startling apparition
Coolly took up its position
With a view of making running on the inside of the track.

Oh, Gaylad was a beauty !
For he knew and did his duty :
Though his reins were flying loosely, strange to say, he never fell ;
But held himself together,
For his weight was but a feather.
Bob Murphy, when he saw him, murmured something like 'Oh, hell !'

But Gaylad passed the filly;
Passed Jack Costigan on Chili;
Cut down the coward Wakatip and challenged Guelder Rose . . .
Here it was he showed his cunning—
Let the mare make all the running:
They turned into the straight at stride for stride and nose for nose.

But Babs was just beginning
To have fears about his winning:
In fact, to tell the truth, my hero felt inclined to cry;
For the Rose was still in blossom;
And two lengths behind her Possum
And gallant little Sterling, slow but sure, were drawing nigh.

Yes! Babsie's heart was failing;
For he felt old Gaylad ailing:
Another fifty yards to go! . . . he felt his chance was gone.
Could he do it? much he doubted:
Then the crowd—oh, how they shouted!
For Babs had never dropped his whip, and now he laid it on!

Down the straight the leaders thundered
While the people cheered and wondered,
For ne'er before had any seen the equal of that sight;

And never will they, maybe,
See a flaxen-headed baby
Flog racehorse to the winning-post with all his tiny might.

But Gaylad's strength is waning—
Gone, in fact, beyond regaining:
Poor Babs is flogging hopelessly, as pale as any ghost:
But he looks so brave and pretty
That the Rose's jock takes pity,
And, pulling back a trifle, lets the baby pass the post.



What cheering and tin-kettling
Had they after at the settling!
And how they fought to see who'd hold the baby on his lap;
As President Montgomery,
With a brimming glass of Pommery,
Proposed the health of Babs Malone, who'd won the Handicap.

AT THE 'J.C.'

None ever knew his name—
Honoured, or one of shame,
  Highborn or lowly;
Only upon that tree
Two letters, J and C,
Carved by him, mark where he
  Lay dying slowly.

Why came he to the West?
Had then the parent nest
  Grown so distasteful?
What cause had he to shun
Life, ere 'twas well begun?
Was he that youngest son,
  Of substance wasteful?

Were Fate and he at war?
Was it a penance, or
  Renunciation?
Is it a glad release?
Has he at length found peace,
Now Death hath bid him cease
  Peregrination?

Hands white, without a blot,
Told us that he was not
  One of 'the vulgar.'
What can those cyphers be?—
Two only, J and C,
Carved in his agony
  Deep in the mulga.

Was there no woman's face
Whose sunny smile might chase
  Clouds from above him?
No bosom white as snow?
No lips to whisper low,
'Why doth he seek to go?
  Do *I* not love him?'

Haunted by flashing charms—
White bosoms, rounded arms,
  Lips of fair ladies—
Striving to break some link:
Was 't that which made him sink,
Dragged by the curse of drink
  Deeper than Hades?

Now, wind across the grave,
Tuning a sultry stave,
  Drearily whistles;
Stirring those branches where
Two silent cyphers stare—
Two letters of a prayer:
  God's Son's initials.

JACK CORRIGAN

'It's my shout this time, boys ; so come along and
breast the bar,
And kindly mention what you're going to take ;
I don't feel extra thirsty, so I'll sample that three-
star '—
Now, lad ! come, look alive, for goodness sake !'

So spake he, as he raised the brimming glass towards
the light ;
So spake Long Jack, the boldest mountaineer
Who ever down from Nungar raced a brumby mob
in flight,
Or laid a stockwhip on a stubborn steer.
From Jindabyne to Providence along the Eucumbene
The kindest-hearted fellow to be found ;
And when he crossed the saddle not a horse was ever
seen
That could make Jack quit his hold to seek the
ground.
The women smiled with pleasure, the children laughed
aloud,
The very dogs came barking to his feet,
While outside the Squatters' Arms the men came
forward in a crowd
To welcome Jack when he rode up the street.

But though the boldest horseman who by midnight or by day
E'er held a mob of cattle on a camp,
There were squatters on Monaro who had yet been known to say
That Jack was an unmitigated scamp.
And true it is Jack Corrigan possessed a serious fault
Which caused his gentle, blue-eyed wife much grief,
And many were the bitter tears she mingled with the salt
With which she cured their neighbours' tend'rest beef.
And often would she tearful take her smiling spouse to task—
Who'd answer, as her pretty face he kissed,
That a beast lost all identity when pickled in the cask,
And a bullock more or less would ne'er be missed.

But now as Jack stood all prepared to toss his nobbler down,
A softly-murmured whisper met his ear:
'I just saw Trooper Fraser get a warrant up the town:
He's after you, old man: you'd better clear!'
Jack never thanked the donor of this excellent advice,
As the glass fell through his fingers with a crash:
With a bound across the footpath, he was mounted in a trice
And speeding down the roadway like a flash,
While Trooper William Fraser wore a very gloomy face,
As he watched his prey go flying down the road;

But he settled in the saddle and prepared to give him
chase,
As Jack struck out a line for his abode.

On the road toward the Show Ground then there
hung a big swing-gate:
Jack's filly cleared its bars in glorious style;
But he held her well together, for he knew the
trooper's weight
Would give him half a distance in each mile;
For Jack rode twelve stone fully, while Bill Fraser
rode but nine:
Sweetbriar's strength must surely soon be spent,
Being grass-fed, while the trooper's chestnut horse
could always dine
Off oats and barley to his heart's content.
And all aloud Jack cursed the day he'd ever killed a
beast
Or branded calf he couldn't call his own,
While the hoof-strokes on the road beat out a song
that never ceased
To echo in his ear with mocking tone.

'Three years in gaol! in gaol three years!' the
jeering echoes sang:
The granite boulders caught the wild refrain:
'A broken life! a weeping wife!' 'twas thus the
rhythm rang;
'And a baby boy you'll never see again!'

He groaned; and then, to dull the sound, spoke loudly to the mare,
And bade her never slacken in her speed:
'For God's sake take me home, lass, with a little time to spare!
Five minutes, at the most, is all I need:
Just time to catch old Dandy, where's he's munching second growth
Of hay: just time to leap upon his back;
And then the smartest trap who ever swore a lying oath
Could never foot me down the River track.'

Sweetbriar pricked her ears, and shook a foam-flake from her bit
As she heard his words, and doubtless caught their sense;
And the rotten granite pebbles rattled round her as she lit
On the homeward side the Rosedale bound'ry fence.

As they scrambled round by Locker's Hill, Jack Corrigan looked round,
And as he looked was filled with stern delight,
For he saw the bald-faced chestnut struggling fiercely on the ground,
Though the hill shut out the sequel from his sight.
His triumph was but short, for, as he stemmed the wide morass,

Where floods had muddied waters once so clear
And left the giant tussocks tangled tightly in a mass,
The trooper still kept drawing on his rear.

The Murrumbidgee's icy stream was widened out by flood:
They swam it at the willow-shaded ford:
As they passed the station buildings his long spurs were red with blood;
Sweetbriar's heaving flanks were deeply scored.
Her stride grew more uneven, though she answered every call:
No jockey rode a better race than Jack
As he eased her up the hills and pressed her onward down the fall,
Round the sidlings of the Billylingra track.

They left O'Rourke's behind them, where it fronts the big bald hill—
At the Flat Rock Jack was riding all he knew—
With all the dash and judgment of the famed Monaro skill,
Yet he couldn't keep the trooper out of view:
He spied his tiny homestead as Bill Fraser gained apace
And loudly warned the fugitive to yield,
Who turned half round but saw no sign of pity in his face
As they swept across the cultivation field:

Their hoofs' dull thunder brought the wife in wonder
to the gate.
She waved her hand in answer to his shout;
While Dandy from his paddock whinnied loudly to
his mate
To know what all the trouble was about.

'God help us now! the end has come!' the wretched
woman cried,
And leant against the gate to catch her breath;
While the tiny, blue-eyed toddler cheered his father
on his ride
Towards the ghastly winning-post of Death.

'The filly's failing fast!' thought Jack; 'she's
nothing but a weed;
It's a certainty she can't keep long in front.
I'll make a splendid target, if he likes to draw a
bead,
As I try to cross the river on the punt.

He left the mare and scrambled through the ti-tree
growing rank,
Deep-rooted in its bed of yellow clay;
But when he reached the river, stood and trembled
on the bank:
'My God!' he hoarsely said, 'it's swept away!'
The punt was gone: the wire rope still stretched from
shore to shore:
Jack paused but half a moment to decide,

And as he scrambled down the bank the wond'ring
trooper saw
Him struggling half across the rushing tide.
The angry waters swept him down, and every nerve
was strained
To keep his hold upon the frail support :
Though icy numbness seized him, yet his courage
never waned :
The hope of freedom filled his every thought.

The rope swayed low beneath his weight and bellied
to the stream :
Around his head the flying ripples curled ;
While high above the river's roar rang out the awful
scream
Of a soul that flies in terror from the world,
As a mighty log, borne swiftly on the bosom of the
flood,
Resistless swept him 'neath the eager wave
That sucked him down to river depths ; and there
beneath the mud
Jack Corrigan sought out a nameless grave.

'Good-bye to life ! good-bye to life !' the mocking
wavelets sang :
The towering cliffs took up the wild refrain.
'A broken life ! a weeping wife !' 'twas thus the
rhythm rang,
'And a baby boy he'll never see again !'



DOWN THE RIVER

Hark the sound of it, drawing nearer!
  Clink of hobble and brazen bell
Mark the passage of stalwart shearer,
  Bidding Monaro soil farewell.
Where is he making for? Down the River—
  Down the River with eager tread!
Where is he making for? Down the River,
  Down the River to seek a shed.

Where is his dwelling on old Monaro?—
  Buckley's Crossing, or Jindaboine?
Dry Plain is it, or sweet Bolaro?
  P'r'aps 'tis near where the rivers join.
Where is he making for? Down the River!
  When, oh, when will he turn him back?
Soft sighs follow him down the River:
  Moist eyes gaze at his fading track.

See! behind him the pack-horse, ambling,
  Bears the weight of his master's kit—
Oft and oft from the pathway rambling,
  Crops unhampered by cruel bit.
Where is he making for, equine rover?—
  Sturdy nag from the Eucumbene,
Tempted down by the thought of clover
  Springing luscious in Riverine.

Dreams of life and its future chances;
  Snatch of song to beguile the way—
Through green crannies the sunlight glances,
  Silver-gilding the bright jack-shay.
'So long, mate! I can stay no longer.
  So long, mate! I've no time to stop:
Pens are waiting me at Mahonga,
  Bluegong, Grubben, and Pullitop.

'What! you say that the River's risen?
  What! that the melted snow has come?
What! that it locks and bars our prison?—
  Many's the mountain stream I've swum

I must onward and cross the River:
  So long, mate! for I cannot stay;
I must onward and cross the River—
  Over the River there lies my way!'

One man short when the roll they're calling!
  One man short at old Bobby Rand's!
Heads are drooping and tears are falling
  Up on Monaro's mountain lands . . .
Where is he making for? Down the River,
  Down the river of slimy bed!
Where is he making for? Down the River,
  Down the River that bears him—dead.



KELLY'S CONVERSION

Kelly the Rager half opened an eye
To wink at the Army passing by,
While his hot breath, thick with the taint of beer,
Came forth from his lips in a drunken jeer.
Brown and bearded and long of limb
He lay, as the Army confronted him
And, clad in grey, one and all did pray
That his deadly sins might be washed away—
But Kelly stubbornly answered 'Nay.'
Then the captain left him in mild despair,
But before the music took up its blare
A pale-faced lassie stepped out and spoke—
A little sad girl in a sad grey cloak –
'Rise up, Kelly! your work's to do:
Kelly, the Saviour's a-calling you!'
He strove to look wise; rubbed at his eyes;
Looked down at the ground, looked up at the skies;
And something that p'r'aps was his conscience stirred:
He seemed perplexed as again he heard
The girl with the garments of saddest hue
Say, 'Kelly, the Saviour's a-calling you!'

He got on his knees and thence to his feet,
And stumbled away down the dusty street;
Contrived to cadge at the pub. a drink,
But still in his ear the glasses chink
And jingle only the one refrain,
Clear as the lassie's voice again:
'Kelly, Kelly, come here to me!
Kelly the Rager, I've work for thee!'
He trembled, and dropped the tumbler, and slopped
The beer on the counter: the barman stopped,
With a curious eye on his haggard face.
'Kelly, old fellow! you're going the pace.
Don't you fancy it's time to take
A pull on yourself—put your foot on the brake?
You'll have the horrors, without a doubt,
This time next week, if you don't look out.'
But he didn't—he sobered himself that night:
'That time next week' he was nearly right:
Yet still at the mill, though he'd stopped the grog,
As the saw bit into the green pine log,
The wood shrieked out to him in its pain
A fragment caught of the same refrain,
As the swift teeth cut and the sawdust flew—
'Kelly, Kelly, I've work for you!'

Then the seasons fell and the floods came down
And laid the dust in the frightened town.
No more the beat of hoofs and feet
Was heard the length of the crooked street;

For, leaving counter and desk and till,
All had fled to the far sandhill;
But everywhere that a man might dare
Risk life to save it—Kelly was *there!*
No more the voice had a tale to tell:
He'd found his work and he did it well.
Who stripped leggings and hat and coat
To swim the lagoon to reach the boat?
Who pushed out in the dead of night
At the mute appeal of a beacon-light?
Who was blessed by the women then,
And who was cheered by the stalwart men,
As he shot the rapids above the town
With two pale Smiths and a weeping Brown,
Landing them safe from his cockle-shell,
Woefully frightened, but safe and well,
With their friends on the sandhill all secure?
Who but Kelly, you may be sure!

They reckoned the heads up, one by one,
And he sighed as he thought that the work was done;
But soon found out that 'twas not begun.
They counted away till it came to pass
They missed the little Salvation lass:
She'd been to pray with a man who lay
Sick on the river-shore, far away.
Men looked askance and the women smote
Their hands in grief, as he launched the boat.
He turned as he cast the painter loose:
'Who'll make another? It's little use

My going alone; for I'm nearly done,
And from here to the point is a stiffish run.'
Then one stepped forward and took an oar,
And the boat shot out for the other shore.
To and fro where the gums hang low
And bar their passage, the comrades row;
Hard up stream where the waters race;
Steady, where floating branches lace;
Through many a danger and sharp escape
And catch of breath, as the timbers scrape
And thrill to the touch of some river shape;
Till at last the huts on the point draw near,
And over their shoulders the boatmen peer.

The flood was running from door to door—
Two-feet-six on the earthen floor;
Half-way up to the bed it ran,
Where two pale women and one sick man
Crouched, and looked at the water's rise
With horror set in their staring eyes;
While the children wept as the water crept.
But how the blood to their hearts high leapt,
As over the threshold the rescuers stepped,
And, wrapped in blanket and shawl and coat,
Carried the saved to the crazy boat!

Then Kelly circled the little lass
With his strong right arm, and as in a glass
Saw himself in her eyes that shone
Sweet in a face that was drawn and wan:

And he felt that for *her* life he'd give his own.
Too short a moment her cheek was pressed
Close to the beat of his spray-wet breast;
While her hair just lay like a golden ray,
The last farewell of a passing day.
Gently he settled her down in the stern
With a tender smile, and had time to turn
To look to the others, and then he saw
That the craft was full and could hold no more.
He looked at the party—old, young, and sick—
While *he* had no tie, neither wife nor chick.

Then with a shove he sent out the boat
Far on the turbid stream afloat.
'Pull!' said Kelly; 'now pull!' said he;
'Pull with your load and come back for me.
You may be late, but at any rate
I'm better able than you to wait.'
They pulled and, looking back, saw him stand
Shading his eyes with his big, rough hand—
Silent, patient, and smiling faced,
With the water curling around his waist.

Return they did, but they found him not:
Nought but the chimney then marked the spot.
They found him not when the boat went back—
Never a trace of him, never a track;
Only the sigh and the dreary cry
Of the gums that had wept to see him die:

These alone had a tale to tell
Of a life that had ended passing well—
The sad refrain of a hero's fate
Tuned in a tongue we may not translate.

Facing Death with a stout, brave heart ;
Choosing the nobler and better part ;
Home to the land of eternal sun
Kelly had gone—for his work was done.

ON THE RANGE

On Nungar the mists of the morning hung low ;
The beetle-browed hills brooded silent and black,
Not yet warmed to life by the sun's loving glow,
As through the tall tussocks rode young Charlie Mac.
What cared he for mists at the dawning of day ?
What cared he that over the valley stern Jack,
The Monarch of Frost, held his pitiless sway ?
A bold mountaineer born and bred was young Mac —
A galloping son of a galloping sire —
Stiffest fence, roughest ground, never took him aback ;
With his father's cool judgment, his dash, and his fire,
The pick of Monaro rode young Charlie Mac.

And the pick of the stable the mare he bestrode—
Arab-grey, built to stay, lithe of limb, deep of chest ;
Who seemed to be happy to bear such a load
As she tossed the soft forelock that curled on her crest.
They crossed Nungar Creek where its span is but short,

At its head, where together spring two mountain rills,
When a mob of wild horses made off with a snort—
'By thunder!' quoth Mac, 'there's the Lord of
the Hills!'
Decoyed from her paddock, a Murray-bred mare
Had fled to the hills with a warrigal band;
A pretty bay foal had been born to her there,
Whose veins held the very best blood in the land—
'The Lord of the Hills,' as the bold mountain men
Whose courage and skill he was wont to defy
Had named him: they yarded him once; but since
then
He held to the saying, 'Once bitten, twice shy.'

The scrubber, thus suddenly roused from his lair,
Made straight for the timber, with fear in his heart.
As Charlie rose up in his stirrups, the mare
Sprang forward—no need to tell Empress to start:
She lay to the chase just as soon as she felt
Her rider's skilled touch, light, yet firm, on the rein.

Stride for stride, lengthened wide, for the green
timber belt—
The fastest half-mile ever done on the plain—
They reached the low sallee before he could wheel
The warrigal mob: up they dashed with a stir
Of low branches and undergrowth—Charlie could feel
His mare catch her breath on the side of the spur
That steeply slopes up till it meets the bald cone.

'Twas here on the range that the trouble began;
For a slip on the sidling, a loose rolling stone,
And the chase would be done; but the bay in the van
And the little grey mare were a sure-footed pair.
He looked once around as she crept to his heel,
And the swish that he gave his long tail in the air
Seemed to say, 'Here's a foeman well worthy my
steel!'

They raced to within half-a-mile of the bluff
That drops to the river—the squadron strung out.
'I wonder,' quoth Mac, 'has the bay had enough!'
But he wasn't left very much longer in doubt,
For the Lord of the Hills struck a spur for the flat
And followed it, leaving his mob, mares and all,
While Empress (brave heart! she could climb like a
cat)
Down the stony descent raced with never a fall.
Once down on the level 'twas galloping ground:
For a while Charlie thought he might yard the big bay
At his uncle's out-station; but no! he wheeled round
And down the sharp dip to the Gulf made his way.

Betwixt the twin portals that, towering high
And backwardly sloping in watchfulness, lift
Their smooth grassy summits towards the far sky,
The course of the clear Murrumbidgee runs swift.
No time then to seek where the crossing should be:
It was in at the one side and out where you could:
But fear never dwelt in the hearts of those three

Who emerged in the shade of the low muzzle-wood.
Once more did the Lord of the Hills strike a line
Up the side of the range, and once more he looked
back :
So close were they now he could see the sun shine
In the bold grey eyes flashing of young Charlie Mac.

He saw little Empress stretched out like a hound
On the trail of its quarry, the pick of the pack,
With ne'er-tiring stride ; and his heart gave a bound
As he saw the lithe stockwhip of young Charlie Mac
Showing snaky and black on the neck of the mare,
In three hanging coils, with a turn round the wrist ;
And he heartily wished himself back in his lair
'Mid the tall tussocks beaded with chill morning mist ;
While he fancied the straight mountain ash trees, the
gums
And the wattles, all mocked him and whispered,
'You lack
The speed to avert cruel capture that comes
To the warrigal fancied by young Charlie Mac ;
For he'll yard you, and rope you, and then you'll be
stuck
In the crush, while his saddle is girthed to your back ;
Then out in the open, and there you may buck
Till you break your bold heart, but you'll never
throw Mac !'

The Lord of the Hills at the thought felt a sweat
Break over the smooth summer gloss of his hide :

He spurted his utmost to leave her, but yet
The Empress crept up to him, stride upon stride.
No need to say Charlie was riding her now,
Yet still for all that he had something in hand,
With here a sharp stoop to avoid a low bough,
Or quick rise and fall as a tree-trunk they spanned.
In his terror the brumby struck down the rough falls
Towards Yiack, with fierce disregard for his neck :
Tis useless, he finds, for the mare overhauls
Him slowly : no timber could keep her in check

There's a narrow-beat pathway that winds to and fro
Down the deeps of the gully, half-hid from the day ;
There's a turn in the track where the hop-bushes grow
And hide the grey granite that crosses the way,
While sharp swerves the path round the boulder's broad base :
And now the last scene in the drama is played
As the Lord of the Hills, with the mare in full chase,
Swept towards it, and ere his long stride could be stayed,
With a gathered momentum that gave not a chance
Of escape, and a shuddering, sickening shock,
Struck the pitiless granite that barred his advance
And sobbed out his life at the foot of the rock ;
While Charlie pulled off with a twitch on the rein
And an answering spring from his surefooted mount,
One might say, unscathed, though a crimsoning stain
Marked the graze of the granite ; but that would ne'er count

With Charlie, who speedily sprang to the earth
To ease the mare's burden his deft-fingered hand
Unslackened her surcingle, loosened tight girth,
And cleansed with a tussock the spurs' ruddy brand.

There he lay by the rock—drooping head, glazing eye,
Strong limbs stilled for ever. No more would he fear
The thud of a horseman, no more would he fly
Through the hills with his harem in rapid career.
The pick of the mountain mob, bays, greys, or roans,
He proved in his death that the pace 'tis that kills;
And a sun-shrunken hide o'er a few whitened bones
Marks the last resting place of the Lord of the Hills.





AT DEVLIN'S SIDING

What made the porter stare so hard? what made the porter stare
And eye the tall young woman and the bundle that she bare?

What made the tall young woman flush, and strive to hide her face,
As the train slid past the platform and the guard swung in his place?

What made her look so stealthily both up and down
the line,
And quickly give the infant suck to still its puny
whine?

Why was the sawmill not at work? why were the men
away?
They might have turned a woman from a woeful deed
that day.

Why did the pine-scrub stand so thick? why was the
place so lone
That nothing but the soldier-birds might hear a baby
moan?

Why doth the woman tear the child? why doth the
mother take
The infant from her breast, and weep as if her heart
would break?

Why doth she moan, and grind her teeth, and weave
an awful curse
To fall on him who made of her a harlot—ay, and
worse?

Why should she fall upon her knees and, with a
trembling hand,
Clear off the underbrush and scrape a cradle in the
sand?

Why doth she shudder as she hears the buzz of eager
flies,
And bind a handkerchief across the sleeping infant's
eyes?

Why doth she turn, but come again and feverishly
twine,
To shield it from the burning sun, the fragrant fronds
of pine?

Why, as she strides the platform, does she try hard
not to think
That somewhere in the scrub a babe is calling her for
drink?

Why, through the alleys of the pine, do languid
breezes sigh
A low refrain that seems to mock her with a baby's
cry?

Seek not to know! but pray for her, and pity, as the train
Carries a white-faced woman back to face the world again.



FEATHERSTONHAUGH

Brookong station lay half-asleep—
   Dozed in the waning western glare.
'Twas before the run had been stocked with sheep,
   And only cattle depastured there,
As the Bluecap mob reined up at the door
And loudly saluted Featherstonhaugh.

'My saintly preacher!' the leader cried:
   I stand no nonsense, as you're aware.
I've a word for you if you'll step outside:
   Just drop that pistol and have a care:
I'll trouble you, too, for the key of the store:
For we're short of tucker, friend Featherstonhaugh.

The muscular Christian showed no fear,
   Though he handed the key with but small delay:
He never answered the ruffian's jeer
   Except by a look which seemed to say:
'Beware, my friend! and think twice before
You raise the devil in Featherstonhaugh.'

Two hours after he reined his horse
  Up in Urana, and straightway went
To the barracks—the trooper was gone, of course!
  Blindly nosing a week-old scent
Away in the scrub around Mount Galore.
'Confound the fellow!' quoth Featherstonhaugh.

'Will any man of you come with me
  And give this Bluecap a dressing-down?'
They all regarded him silently
  As he turned his horse with a scornful frown.
'You're curs, the lot of you, to the core!
I'll go by myself!' said Featherstonhaugh.

The scrub was thick on Urangeline,
  As he followed the tracks that twisted through
The box and dogwood and scented pine
  (One of their horses had cast a shoe)
Steeped from his youth in forest lore,
He could track like a nigger, could Featherstonhaugh.

He paused as he saw the thread of smoke
  From the outlaw camp, and he marked the sound
Of a hobble-check, as it sharply broke
  The silence that held the scrub-land bound.
There were their horses—two, three, four!
'It's a risk; but I'll chance it!' quoth Featherston-
      haugh.

He loosed the first and it walked away;
  But his comrade's silence could not be bought,
For he raised his head with a sudden neigh,
  And plainly showed that he'd not be caught.
As a bullet sang from a rifle-bore,
'It's time to be moving!' quoth Featherstonhaugh.

The brittle pine, as they broke away,
  Crackled like ice in a winter's ponds;
The strokes fell fast on the cones that lay
  Buried beneath the withered fronds
That softly carpet the sandy floor:
Swept two on the tracks of Featherstonhaugh.

They struck the path that the stock had made—
  A dustily-red, well-beaten track.
The leader opened a fusilade
  Whose target was Featherston's stooping back;
But his luck was out; not a bullet tore
As much as a shred from Featherstonhaugh.

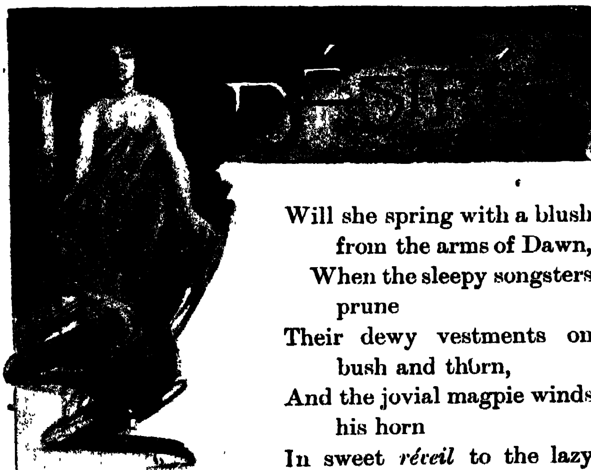
Rattle 'em! rattle 'em fast on the pad
  Where the sloping shades fell dusk and dim!
The manager's heart beat high and glad,
  For he knew the creek was a mighty swim.
Already he heard a smothered roar:
'They're done like a dinner!' quoth Featherston-
haugh.

It was almost dark as they neared the dam :
  He struck the crossing as true as a hair :
For the space of a second the pony swam ;
  Then shook himself in the chill night air.
In a pine-tree shade on the further shore,
With his pistol cocked, stood Featherstonhaugh.

A splash ! an oath ! and a rearing horse !
  A thread snapped short in the fateful loom !
The tide, unaltered, swept on its course
  Though a fellow-creature had met his doom.
Pale and trembling, and struck with awe,
Bluecap stood opposite Featherstonhaugh.

While the creek rolled muddily in between,
  The eddies played with the drowned man's hat.
The stars peeped out in their summer sheen :
  A night-bird chirruped across the flat.
Quoth Bluecap, 'I owe you a heavy score,
And I'll live to repay it, Featherstonhaugh !'

But he never did ; for he ran his race
  Before he had time to fulfil his oath :
I can't think how ; but in any case,
  He was hung, or drowned—or it may be both ;
But whichever it was, he came no more
To trouble the peace of Featherstonhaugh.



Will she spring with a blush
    from the arms of Dawn,
  When the sleepy songsters
    prune
Their dewy vestments on
    bush and thorn,
And the jovial magpie winds
    his horn
In sweet *réveil* to the lazy
    morn
  And the sun comes all too soon?
Will she come with him from the farthest rim
  Of the blue Pacific sea?
But how shall I know my lady? and by
  What token will she know me?

Will she come to me in the noonday hush,
  When the flowers are fast asleep
'Neath their counterpane of emerald plush
In the fragrant warmth of the under-brush,
Where Spring still lingers on moist and lush—
  While naught but the shadows creep,
And all is rest but the eager quest
  And the buzz of the tireless bee?
But how shall I know my lady then?
  And how will my love know me?

Or will she come when the gallant Day
  At the hands of the Night lies dead?
When stealthy creatures have right of way
Among the branches to romp and play,
And the great green forest turns ashen gray
  At the sound of the dead men's tread?
Will my lady slip with smile on lip
  From the heart of a white box tree?
But how shall I know 'tis she who comes?
  And how will she know 'tis me?

Will her hair be tinged as when sunbeams gird
  A castle of carmine rock?
Or brown as a leaf in the sun's kiss curled?
Or dark as the wing of that sable bird
Whose hated voice is so often heard
  In the wake of the bleating flock?

Or will it be rolled in a crown of gold,
  An emblem of royalty?
But how will I know 'tis she who comes?
  And how will she know 'tis me?

Is her ear as shapely as Venus' shell,
  And pierced by a diamond gleam?
Is her hand as white as the immortelle?
Her voice as sweet as that sounding bell
The gray bird tolls to the listening dell
  Where the ti-tree hides the stream?
Have the words been said? is my lady wed?
  Is my lady bond or free?—
No matter who claims her earthly form,
  For her heart belongs to me!

Will her eyes be clear as the amber flight
  Of the stream over sandstone bar?
Or darkly blue as the vault of night?
Will her flesh show pink through its veil of white,
And its violet-pencilled curves be bright
  As the polished breast of a star?
And where, oh, where may you find a pair
  Who shall love so well as we?
But how shall I know my lady? by
  What token will she know me?

Will her cloak be shaped from the southern skies
  And girt by a starry sash—
Like an azure mist, as my lady hies
With the light of love in her kindling eyes?
Will she move with the solemn grace that lies
  In the towering mountain ash! . . .
Will she come at all? may it not befall
  That our fates are dark and dree?
That I may never know her at all,
  And she may never know me?

WHERE THE DEAD MEN LIE

Out on the wastes of the Never Never—
  That's where the dead men lie!
There where the heat-waves dance for ever—
  That's where the dead men lie!
That's where the Earth's loved sons are keeping
Endless tryst: not the west wind sweeping
Feverish pinions can wake their sleeping—
  Out where the dead men lie!

Where brown Summer and Death have mated—
  That's where the dead men lie!
Loving with fiery lust unsated—
  That's where the dead men lie!
Out where the grinning skulls bleach whitely
Under the saltbush sparkling brightly;
Out where the wild dogs chorus nightly—
  That's where the dead men lie!

Deep in the yellow, flowing river—
  That's where the dead men lie!
Under the banks where the shadows quiver—
  That's where the dead men lie!

Where the platypus twists and doubles,
Leaving a train of tiny bubbles ;
Rid at last of their earthly troubles—
That's where the dead men lie !

East and backward pale faces turning—
That's how the dead men lie !
Gaunt arms stretched with a voiceless yearning—
That's how the dead men lie !
Oft in the fragrant hush of nooning
Hearing again their mothers' crooning,
Wrapt for aye in a dreamful swooning—
That's how the dead men lie !

Only the hand of Night can free them—
That's when the dead men fly !
Only the frightened cattle see them—
See the dead men go by !
Cloven hoofs beating out one measure,
Bidding the stockman know no leisure—
That's when the dead men take their pleasure !
That's when the dead men fly !

Ask, too, the never-sleeping drover :
He sees the dead pass by ;
Hearing them call to their friends—the plover,
Hearing the dead men cry ;
Seeing their faces stealing, stealing,
Hearing their laughter pealing, pealing,
Watching their grey forms wheeling, wheeling
Round where the cattle lie !

Strangled by thirst and fierce privation—
That's how the dead men die!
Out on Moneygrub's farthest station—
That's how the dead men die!
Hardfaced greybeards, youngsters callow;
Some mounds cared for, some left fallow;
Some deep down, yet others shallow;
Some having but the sky.

Moneygrub, as he sips his claret,
Looks with complacent eye
Down at his watch-chain, eighteen-carat—
There, in his club, hard by:
Recks not that every link is stamped with
Names of the men whose limbs are cramped with
Too long lying in grave mould, camped with
Death where the dead men lie.



NOTES

NOTES TO POEMS.

1. From the Far West, p. 1.—Printed in *The Sydney Mail*, February 14, 1891. Signed 'B. H. B., Wagga Wagga.'

Verse 1. 'the Never Never land.' Or, the Never Never country—a phrase used to denote the more or less desert interior of Australia. Date of first use and origin unknown; but was employed in Queensland about 1860. Somewhat fantastically suggested that it signified the sun-smitten land whither pioneers journeyed and never, never returned.

Verse 3. 'piker.' An old wild bullock or cow—so called from its ill-tempered habit of charging horsemen, as a piker? The lowered horns at the charge *do* suggest pike-heads.

Verse 6. 'the saltbush' sickly shade.' Saltbush is the vernacular name of a salinous shrub of the order *chenopodiaceæ*, which grows freely on the arid plains of central Australia, often where other vegetation is scarce or absent. There are many species, some of which are so eagerly eaten by sheep and cattle that they are fast disappearing. The plant's average height is from four to twelve feet, and most species throw little or no shade. Boake probably refers to *atriplex vesicaria* or *halimoides*.

2. Jack's Last Muster, p. 4.—Printed in *The Sydney Mail*, December 13, 1890. Signed 'Sursinglr, Wagga Wagga'—this a misprint of 'Surcingle.' To the printed title was added—'Diamantina River, Western Queensland.'

Verse 7. 'That C O B gray one' C O B was one of the cattle brands of Cobb and Co.—a pastoral and coaching firm whose name is familiar throughout the east Australian interior. In verse 16 Boake sounds the letters together as Cobb.

Verse 9. 'yellowtop.' Vernacular for *panicum flavidum*, or yellow-flowered panick grass,' a valuable perennial grass found over a large area of interior eastern Australia.

3. A MEMORY, p. 9.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, November 14, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.'

4. JOSEPHUS RILEY, p. 13.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, April 16, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.'

5. A VISION OUT WEST, p. 19.—Now first published. The title in MS. is 'Westward the course of empire rolls.'

Verse 9. 'Mitchell grass.' Vernacular for *astrebla clymoides* and other species of *astrebla*—a perennial grass common to interior eastern Australia. The seeds are carried in ears like small wheat ears, and were formerly used for food by the aborigines. 'Mitchell' is owed to Mitchell the explorer (1792-1855.)

6. JIM'S WHIP, p. 26.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, March 19, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' A note by author was appended: 'It is a very common thing for a stockman to say, speaking of its excellence, "That's the whip that brought the cattle home after the drought."'

Verse 1. 'sallee.' Vernacular for one of the 300 or so Australian species of acacia. Wattle, yarran, mulga, brigalow, myall, &c., are other common names of some of them. These names seem applied almost indiscriminately to different species in different districts—one man's 'yarran' being another man's 'myall,' and so on—to the confusion of botanists. Boake possibly refers to *acacia longifolia*—a good-sized shrub or small tree.

7. THE DEMON SNOW-SHOES, p. 29.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, October 10, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.' There was a sub-title—'A Legend of Kiandra.'

8. A VALENTINE, p. 35.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, February 13, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.'

Verse 5. 'lignum.' This is the swamp lignum, or native broom (*viminaria denudata*). It is a soft-wooded shrub growing up to 20ft. high. Found throughout Australia. In 'Fogarty's Gin,' p. 53, it is again mentioned.

9. THE BOX-TREE'S LOVE, p. 39.—Posthumously printed in *The Bulletin*, June 16, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' An editor's note was appended: 'Found among the papers of the late Barcroft H. Boake—probably one of his first metrical efforts.'

10. A WAYSIDE QUEEN, p. 48.—Posthumously printed in *The Bulletin*, May 14, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.'

11. FOGARTY'S GIN, p. 52—Printed in *The Bulletin*, March 19, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' A note by author was appended: 'Burgess' Cob—an eerie beast that awaits a historian.' I have not been able to ascertain the reference.

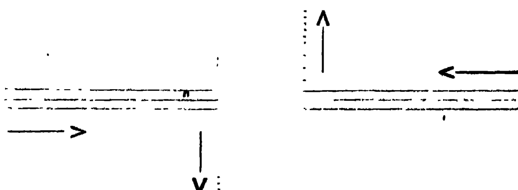
12. A SONG FROM A SANDHILL, p. 58.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, April 2, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.'

13. THE BABES IN THE BUSH, p. 60.—Now first published. There is no title in MS.

14. THE DIGGER'S SONG, p 65.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, October 31, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.'

15. HOW POLLY PAID FOR HER KEEP, p. 67.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, February 6, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' A note by author was appended: 'Where a mail road passes through a fence it is customary to dispense with a gate, a lane being built on either side of the opening instead, which goes by the name of a "break."'

Verse 17. 'Carabost break.' To Boake's note it may be added that from each extremity of the break, or opening in the fence barriers (generally of brush) are built for a short distance at right angles or otherwise, thus—



The object is to avoid the cost and trouble of a gate, while preventing the passage of sheep from one paddock to another. *E.g.*, sheep feeding along the fence in the direction of the arrows above, and reaching the barrier, would be turned back into the centre of their own paddock. The lane is narrow—hence the need of clever steering (*verse 26*).

Verse 27. 'The change.' The end of a coach-stage, where horses are changed.

16. AN ALLEGORY, p. 73.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, March 26, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.'

17. KITTY MCCRAE, p. 74.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, December 19, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.' There was a sub-title—'A Galloping Rhyme.'

18. 'TWIXT THE WINGS OF THE YARD, p. 80.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, October 17, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.'

19. A SONG, p. 84.—Now first published.

20. SKEETA, p. 86.—Posthumously printed in *The Bulletin*, December 17, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake, N. S. Wales.' There was a sub-title—'An Old Servant's Story.'

21. ON THE BOUNDARY, p. 93.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, March 12, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.'

Verse 5. 'The murmuring belar.' The belar or bull-oak (*casuarina glauca*) is a ragged-looking tree, averaging 30 or 40 feet in height. Found all over eastern Australia. It resembles rather a pine than an oak, and the feathery foliage sways and murmurs as a pine's. The Linnæan name is derived from the likeness of this foliage to the drooping plumes of a cassowary.

22. BABS MALONE, p. 95.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, February 20, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' The title was printed—'How Babs Malone Cut Down the Field.'

23. AT THE 'J C.,' p. 104.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, January 9, 1892. Signed 'Bancroft H. Boake, N. S. Wales'—'Bancroft' a misprint. To the printed title 'West Queensland' was added.

24. JACK CORRIGAN, p. 106.—Posthumously printed in *The Bulletin*, June 4, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' An editor's note was appended: 'Found among the papers of the late Barcroft H. Boake.'

This ballad, like most by Boake, is founded on fact. 'Locker's hill,' 'the Flat Rock,' etc., are landmarks well known in the district around Rosedale station, previously referred to.

25. DOWN THE RIVER, p. 113.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, February 6, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' Notes by author were appended: *Verse 1.* 'the river'—the Murrumbidgee. *Verse 2.* 'where the rivers join'—the Snowy and Eucumbene rivers.

Verse 2. 'Buckley's crossing'—of the Snowy River, N.S.W. 'Jindaboine,' (properly Jindabyne) 'Dry Plain,' 'Bolaro,' are villages in the Monaro district.

Verse 4. 'jack-shay,' a billycan or quart pot. I should be glad to learn date of first use and origin.

'Mahonga,' 'Bluegong' (properly Brookong), 'Grubben,' and 'Pullitop' are well-known Riverina stations.

Verse 6. 'old Bobby Rand.' An eccentric Riverina squatter, not long dead, and formerly owner of Mahonga station and others.

26. Kelly's Conversion, p. 116.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, December 19, 1891. Signed 'Sureingle.'

27. On the Range, p. 122.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, May 30, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.'

This poem records an actual occurrence. 'Young Charlie Mac' was Charles McKeahnie, son of Mr. Alex. McKeahnie, of Rosedale, previously referred to.* He was killed in 1895 through a horse falling with him.

'To the warrigal fancied by young Charlie Mac.' 'Warrigal'—a term drawn from an aboriginal dialect—is still applied to a wild horse in some districts of New South Wales; though 'brumby' seems to be superseding it.

'muzzle-wood.' This is *eucalyptus stellulata*, a tree which in the Monaro district usually grows to a height of from 12 to 20 feet. In the early days the wood was often used to make muzzles for young calves—whence the name.

28. At Devlin's Siding, p. 128.—Posthumously printed in *The Bulletin*, December 17, 1892. Signed 'Bancroft H. Boake, N. S. Wales'—'Bancroft' a misprint. The printed title was 'Deserted: As Seen at Devlin's Siding;' in MS. it is simply 'At Devlin's Siding.'

29. Featherstonhaugh, p. 132.—Posthumously printed in *The Bulletin*, June 11, 1892. Signed 'Barcroft H. Boake.' An editor's note was appended: 'Verses found among the papers of the lamented writer.'

'Featherstonhaugh'—so written by Boake and printed in *The Bulletin*—should be 'Fetherstonhaugh' throughout; but the sheet containing these verses had been printed when I became aware of the following facts regarding their subject:—

It was about 1870 that a party of four young desperadoes, consisting of 'Bluecap,' 'Dick the Devil,' and others, held the north bank of the Murrumbidgee for some time. Bluecap appeared to adopt the Claude du Val style. All the stations up and down the river were stuck up. The ladies were asked to play and sing, and report goes that one rather high and mighty 'squattah' was forced to cook mutton chops for them. The police managed to capture

two of them; and later on the other two, after a stand-up fight with Mr. Waller, of Kooba station, and some police, had to leave their horses and swim the Murrumbidgee River. They made their way to Argon, an outstation of Tubbo, where they got firearms and horses. They then headed for the mountains, *via* Yamma and Boree Creek. On their way, a man named Hammond joined them, and the three turned up next at Claxton's accommodation house on Brookong. Thence they made for Brookong station, then owned by Hebden and Osbornes, and managed by C. Fetherstonhaugh.

It was shearing time, but there had been some rain, and no one was at work, and the sheep-washers were all up at the head station over some 'barney' that had occurred. Fetherstonhaugh was away when the bushrangers appeared on the scene, and rode up quite unconcernedly to find himself covered by the rifle of a man kneeling down, who called upon him to stand. He turned his mare round sharp, and the fellow (Hammond) fired and missed him. He rode away, but turned and came back, fearing the bushrangers might burn the house or ill-treat some one. They were very civil, and he had a long talk with Bluecap. Finally they cleared out with two of the station horses and about £30, telling Fetherstonhaugh that if he followed them or attempted to go for the police they would assuredly shoot him. The last thing they were heard to say was that they thought they would go and shoot 'Old Rand.'

As soon as they left Fetherstonhaugh started to Urana and telegraphed all round, and then returned to a station near Urana and requested the men to turn out and see if they could not come on the bushrangers at Rand's, about 12 miles away. The proposition was not received with favour. It was by this time dark, and, having borrowed a single-barrelled pistol, Fetherstonhaugh went off to see if he could come across the fellows, the idea being to get their horses if possible. He found no tracks on the road to Rand's station, nor had they visited his Urangeline station. He turned then for one of his own outstations, and, in riding up to an outstation of Rand's appropriately called 'the flash hut,' he saw one of the stolen horses hanging up. He was at once challenged and fired on, and in making tracks was pursued, while in all seven shots were fired at him, and he could hear the bullets singing. Knowing the country well, he made for the creek and got across all right, but the bushrangers attempted to cross on a dam that was broken in the centre, which break could not be seen from the bank, and Hammond was drowned. Bluecap was arrested some time after; and Duce, the third man, was also taken, but not before he had shot a trooper.

30. Desiree, p. 136.—Now first published. Spelt 'Désirè' in MS.

31. Where the Dead Men Lie, p. 140.—Printed in *The Bulletin*, December 19, 1891. Signed 'Surcingle.' The title in MS. is 'Where the Dead Lie.'

MEMOIR

BARCROFT BOAKE: A MEMOIR.

MOST of the material for the following account of Boake's life has been supplied by his father, Mr. B. C. Boake, whose kindness I gratefully acknowledge. I have also received valuable help from Miss Clarice Boake, a sister of the poet; from Mr. W. A. Lipscomb, surveyor, with whom Boake worked as assistant; from Mr. L. C. Raymond, for some time his associate while with Mr. Lipscomb; from Mr. F. S. Boyd, his old mate; from Mr. Alex. McKeahnie and Miss Jean McKeahnie, of Rosedale Station, N.S.W., Mrs. John McKeachie (née McKeahnie) of Dungalear Station, N.S.W., and Mrs O'Connor and Miss O'Connor, of Wagga, N.S.W.—among the most prized of Boake's few friends. Thanks to these and others, I do not think that any important fact in Boake's life, or trait in his character, has escaped me.

When undertaking to edit this volume, I felt, as Australians must feel, keen literary grief at the early

death of an Australian writer so brilliant and promising as Boake. Proceeding with the task, that literary grief became a personal grief. My admiration of the poet did not lessen: it merged in admiration of the man. From a hundred little sources flowed evidence of Boake's courage, of his generosity, of his unselfish affection, of his simplicity and worth. That listless, shy, moody, dispirited bushman hid under an unprepossessing exterior a heart of gold—his mother's.

There is a modern theory which holds that the characters of both male and female are contained in every individual of a bisexual species. At some time previous to birth causes still imperfectly understood decide which set of characters is to become overt, which to remain covert. But often it seems as if influences this way and that had been so equally balanced that the preponderating sex is belied by the outward symbols. We speak of 'masculine women,' of 'effeminate men.' And it is curious to note how in such persons, as life goes on, the sex really dominant frequently develops secondary characteristics in defiance of the sex primarily in possession.

If the idea be grasped that outward sex-form is no infallible indication of the dominant sex, but merely an expression of the resultant of sex-forces at one particular stage of growth, a flood of light is shed on apparent physical and psychical anomalies. We see every individual not as male wholly or female

wholly, but as compounded of male and female in proportions indefinitely varying. This person, outwardly male, is essentially three-fourths female; that one, outwardly female, is one-third male; yonder is another in whom male and female meet on equal terms. The combinations are infinite.

Such a theory explains, for example, why 'George Eliot,' with all her talent, could rarely write poetry; since the basis of poetry is emotion, the male sphere is essentially intellectual, and George Eliot was markedly male. It explains, for example, why John Keats was so emotionally sensitive; since the female sphere is essentially emotional, and a poet is half woman. To male intensity and originality he must join female receptivity and sympathy; thinking deeply, yet not more deeply than he feels; blending head and heart in happy unison. As the male element is prominent in the literature of actuality, so the female element is prominent in the literature of imagination. It is especially prominent in poetry; for, while the most idealistic fiction builds on a realistic basis, to the poet belongs the pure ideal: he alone can dwell in the rarest ether of phantasy.

Boake inherited from his father a poetical brain; from his mother the sensitive temperament which refined its conceptions to the pitch of genius. His sex gave him the virile heat to concentrate passion in glowing words. Of genius, in the severest and most

modern sense, Boake had no small share. There is in his best work that fascination, that moving force which the most cultured talent can never command. By education he was poorly equipped. But his ideas gained in force what they lost in range. It was partly because his mind had not been bemused with word-images that his sense-images were exceptionally vivid. And he moved on an intellectual plane. His knowledge would have increased, his horizon widened, without loss of emotional power. He died at the outset of a career, achieving little of all that his capacity promised. In the potent years from twenty-six to thirty-three, had fortune favoured, Boake might easily have won recognition as the foremost poet of Australia.

Boake's mother was a native of Adelaide, where she was born on 5th January, 1845. Her maiden name was Florence Eva Clarke. She was the only child of her parents; and at the time of her marriage on 7th March, 1865, she had been living with her mother in Sydney, having come thither from Adelaide on the death of her father several years previously. Her father, Henry Clarke, was by profession an accountant, and in many ways she resembled him. Her mother outlived her, and died on 8th August, 1894.

When Florence Clarke married she was twenty years old. She was then of a middle height, rather

slender and delicate in appearance; with clear skin, large blue eyes, and beautiful golden-brown hair, long and silken. Her son Barcroft inherited her noticeable Jewish nose and keenly nervous temperament: in manhood he is described as 'simply a hard masculine likeness of his mother.'

Barcroft Capel Boake, father of the poet (still living at Daylesford, Victoria), was born at Dublin, Ireland, on 12th November, 1838. His unusual name of Barcroft had been handed down in the family for generations; and came to him from his cousin and godfather, the Rev. Barcroft Boake, D.D., one-time incumbent of Holy Trinity Church, Balaclava, Melbourne. As a lad he gained some experience in photography; and when he emigrated to Australia at the age of twenty he found a profitable living in the business.

The young couple were married at St. John's Church, Darlinghurst, by the Rev. Edward Rogers. They commenced their life together at Vergemont Cottage, Waterview Bay, Balmain; where their first child, Barcroft Henry Thomas, the subject of this memoir, was born on 26th March, 1866. As a boy he was in no way remarkable. A portrait of him at the age of five shows a smiling, sweet-faced child beside a sweet-faced, smiling mother—the resemblance in feature and expression being then, however, less distinct than it was later.

Shortly after Barcroft's birth the home was shifted to No. 330, George-street, Sydney, where his father for long had a photographic studio. Here the family lived two years, removing then to a house purchased



BARCROFT CAPEL BOAKE, AGED THIRTY-TWO.

at Lavender Bay, on the North Shore of Sydney harbour, where ten peaceful years were spent. When 'Bartie' was about nine years old, Mr. Allen Hughan, of Nouméa, New Caledonia, paid his father a visit. Mr. Hughan was an intimate friend, and on leaving begged that the boy, to whom he had taken a fancy, might be permitted to go with him to Nouméa for a

time. The Boakes consented, with the condition that their son should be taught French; and during an absence of two years he acquired a moderate knowledge of that language.



FLORENCE EVA BOAKE, AGED TWENTY-FIVE.

While the boy was in Nouméa the Boake family removed to North Willoughby, not far from Sailor Bay, one of the arms of Middle Harbour. Here, on

4th November, 1879, Mrs. Boake died of puerperal fever, after giving birth to twin boys—one of whom died in infancy, while the other, an idiot, lived to the age of fourteen. She had in all nine children: two,



BARCROFT BOAKE, AGED NINE.

a boy and a girl, died in their third year; four daughters are now living.

Mrs. Boake's character is described as combining force and tenderness in a singular and charming

degree. She was of cheerful temperament: fond of society, yet preferring the intimacy of home. For a long time after her marriage she continued to study French and music, that she might be able to teach



BARCROFT BOAKE, AGED ELEVEN.

her children. Her death was a keen grief to the family: the irreparable loss altered their whole future. Writing to his friend Mr. Hughan, Barcroft, then thirteen years old, said: 'Mamma has been taken away, leaving a little baby boy behind—what an exchange!'

His father at this time was prospering in business, and Barcroft grew up a sturdy lad, well cared for. At an early age he could swim and handle a boat. In cricket and football he took less interest; but he



BARCROFT BOAKE, AGED EIGHTEEN.

was a good tennis-player, and he rode a pony, as well as a bicycle of the old-fashioned pattern. He went to school till he was about seventeen—for a few months at the Sydney Grammar School, and for nearly five

years with Mr. Edward Blackmore, in Hunter-street, Sydney. He displayed no unusual ability; and is described as a quiet, reserved boy, yet by no means mopish; fond of reading; noticeably honourable, generous, and constant in his affections. He was particularly attached to his grandmother, Mrs. Clarke, who took charge of the household when her daughter died; and his letters in later years of absence frequently make loving enquiry as to her welfare.

When seventeen years old young Boake was placed in the office of a Sydney land-surveyor, who taught him sufficient draughtsmanship to pass an examination for admission to the Government Survey Department, and borrowed (but never repaid) £100 of a sum of £200 given to Boake by his father. This money was the fruit of an endowment insurance policy; and some time afterwards his father asked the lad to withdraw the money from the bank where it was supposed to lie. Then the latter avowed with tears that he had practically lost £100, and had spent the interest of the remainder on the racecourse. His father, though vexed, made light of the matter; but Barcroft suffered such distress of mind that he eagerly seized an opportunity to leave Sydney. In July, 1886, after about twelve months spent in the Survey Office as temporary draughtsman, he took the place of field-assistant to Mr. E. Commins, a surveyor whose headquarters were at Rocklands farm, near Adaminaby, N.S.W.

Adaminaby is a small township in the elevated Monaro district, where in parts during winter snow sometimes covers the ground for weeks together. Here Boake spent two happy years. He was just turned twenty, and eagerly welcomed the change from city streets. His health was perfect; his surroundings novel and interesting. He lived, for the most part, the free out-door life congenial to him; and at Rosedale Station Mr. and Mrs. Alex. McKeahnie welcomed him to a home circle for whose members he cherished warm and lasting regard.

From this point there are extant occasional letters from Boake to his relatives and friends, which give directer insight to his mode of life and thought. Writing from Rocklands to his father on 29th May, 1887, he says—

. . . I had a pleasant ride to-day in and out to Adaminaby in the pouring rain—to church. This was a woman's freak. ——— would go, and asked me; and as I can't refuse a lady as a rule I made a martyr of myself.

. . . Tennis every afternoon.

. . . I will give you an extract from my diary for the last fortnight. 'Got up just as the breakfast was going in. Rushed in just as grace was finished; ate two chops; bullied Miss M——— about the tea being too weak. After breakfast smoke in the kitchen. Did plans till eleven; another smoke; dinner at one—ate a plate of mutton. Another smoke. Mrs. C——— and I play young Boyd and Miss M———; and, strange to say, always beat them. Mrs. C——— retires about nine; I put in the time yarning in the kitchen with Jack and the cook (Chinese) till ten—then bed.'

Of course, on Saturday whole holiday; go to Adaminaby; hear the latest yarn from W——, the publican (mostly discreditable); then home. On Sunday read the papers all day; tennis in the afternoon.

This is the programme, except that we have cutlets for breakfast occasionally instead of chops. I think I have had beef once only since the spring . . .

At this time, of course, winter was approaching—the severe Monaro winter—and the surveying camp had been broken up. Boake felt the round of office-work at the farm monotonous after the cheerful changes of the camp. He bore confinement ill at any time, inheriting from his father a predisposition to melancholy which could only be subdued by physical exercise and social excitement. For his temperament was sluggish: he was a dreamer and procrastinator —quick to perceive, slow to act—executing task-work reluctantly and mechanically, though developing plenty of fitful energy when spurred by appropriate stimuli.

Of this dreamy habit, apart from his general delicacy of constitution, the chief cause was a weak, slow-beating heart—often met among children reared in the moist and depressing climate of Sydney. And Boake further slowed his slow heart by the excessive use of tobacco. 'The pipe was never out of his mouth.' In the mountain air of Monaro, and especially when walking or riding a great deal, he could throw off the tobacco lethargy and appear for the most part cheerful, even gay. But when his

body went unexercised, his mind became immediately overcast. Then he smoked to drive away the blue devils, and every pipeful brought another blue devil to attack him. The troubles and disappointments which a more buoyant temperament would have brushed aside oppressed Boake permanently. He saw the anthills in his mental path as mountains. Time after time he felt himself losing his hold on life; and his craving for adventurous physical employment —in part, as he suggests, hereditary—was partly born of an instinct that this way lay salvation.

When at last he returned to depressing Sydney he came, as his father says, to 'a house of gloom.' He was unemployed, physically unexercised: mental troubles reacted on his body, and bodily languor on his mind. And always he smoked, smoked, and his heart beat more slowly; till he would sit for hours with his head bent down—speechless, pulseless, almost lifeless. On previous occasions he had roused himself to end a similar lethargy by change of living scene and occupation. This time the conditions were unfavourable; the disease too desperate for any but a desperate remedy. And Boake changed Life for Death. In effect, he was killed by three things in particular: his sensitive brain, his weak heart, and tobacco. And I am not sure it would be extravagant to say that the greatest of these was tobacco.

It must be remembered that Boake received little more than a fair middle-class education (as that phrase

was understood in the seventies) and left school at the age of seventeen. His parents were people of more than average intelligence, but with no exceptional culture. His father strung undistinguished rhymes: his mother had literary tastes, but no literary talents. Consequently the rough form of most of Boake's compositions is not surprising. In syntax and spelling he did not often blunder; but he was careless in punctuation, and in his letters—scribbled, of course, only for friendly eyes—the sentences run on with hardly a pause. For convenience I have punctuated the quotations which I make, and have occasionally altered the spelling in conformity with usage: otherwise the matter remains as Boake wrote it.

At the date of the next letter preserved (31st July, 1887), winter has fairly grappled with Monaro. 'For the last two months we have had snow every week,' writes Boake to his father;

. . . in Kiandra they are finally snowed in for the winter. The traffic in and out has ceased for some time, with the exception of the mail; and last Sunday it could not get in on account of the snow, so now he has to take it as near as he can on horseback, and a man comes out from the town on snow-shoes and takes it in. . . Fancy having to use these in sunny Australia! but in Kiandra and the mountains they are the only means of travelling. They have been able to use them in Adaminaby for pleasure, not necessity. It is great sport. They are about seven feet long—just a long mountain-ash paling four inches wide, steamed and turned up at the point, with a leather strap in the middle for the feet.

They travel at a tremendous pace on falling ground: of course, on the level or up-hill they can only go slowly . . .

Nearly a year intervenes; and Boake writes to his father a remarkable letter giving particulars of a mock hanging by which he nearly lost his life. This incident made an indelible impression on his mind, and I have no doubt that in brooding over it he familiarised the idea of suicide by hanging which he subsequently adopted. (The first paragraph is given *literatim* as in the original.)

Rocklands, Adaminiby,
16th July, 1888.

My Dear Father

it is some time since I let you hear how I was getting on, though I wrote to Grannie and Addie not so long since but have not heard from them for some time, as usual the weather is the all-engrossing topic, we have had one very heavy fall of snow and numerous light ones, the snow was on the ground for four days before it began to thaw, and our poor horses got a starving I can assure you we made a pair of shoes and tried our hands at snowshoeing, it must be grand sport from what I can see of it, we got some awfull spills you will be going along fine, and suddenly your feet will give a jump and shoot straight from under you leaving you on the broad of your back it is extremely amusing for the bystanders, things are very dull everywhere now, just the same old routine of work during the week and spending the Sunday at Rosedale.

Last Saturday night, though, we had high tragedy, when, through a piece of silly foolishness, I was within an ace of losing my life. It has been a bit of a lesson for me not to indulge in foolish practical jokes. Boydie and I were in the kitchen talking and fooling with Miss B—— and young

Ted the rouseabout; and I forget what started it, but we said we would both hang ourselves. There was a gamble that they hung the sheep on hanging to a beam with a loose end of rope. I, like a fool, made a slip-knot in it, and, tieing a handkerchief over my face, said good-bye to them all and put the noose round my neck (Boydie was hanging himself with his handkerchief) and let the noose tighten round my throat. Miss B —— ran out of the kitchen round to her room. I was swinging, as I said, with the rope pretty tight round my neck, with my weight on my hands; and the last I remember is Miss B —— leaving.

Then I lost all consciousness of the outer world, but seemed to be dreaming. I felt no pain, but seemed to be pondering on the strangeness of this world and the people, and what a wonderful thing science was. But gradually I seemed to get a feeling of irritation and tried not to think, but I had to; thoughts seemed to crowd before my eyes like the passing of a train, so quickly that it was pain to watch them. Then, I suppose, there was a blank; and the next thing I thought I was on the Milson's Point boat. I could hear water splashing, and felt her gradually slow off as she drew alongside the wharf. Then I knew something had happened to me. I could see people all round me, and I knew at once I was on the boat and had been struck down by heart-disease (Dr. Cox told me once that I had a weak heart) and I dreamily thought, Well, I am going to die at last; and then the boat seemed to be sinking down, down, and I could feel the water rush over me and feel it wet on my cheek. There seemed to be some fearful weight crushing my chest in. It got worse and worse, and gradually I woke to the reality that I was lying on the floor with everyone round me bathing my hands and temples, while I was having a mortal struggle for breath.

Oh! it was an awful struggle—ten times worse than the hanging. I would sink back on the floor, and then suddenly be convulsed and nearly sit up in my struggle to breathe;

and they told me the sounds I made were something sickening. I felt as if my chest was smashed in with a blow and would not expand—I never want to go through it again. At last I got better, and was able to swallow a little brandy, and got all right after a time—but my neck! I have a rope mark now all round it, and the next day (yesterday, that is) the muscles were swollen like great ropes, and the headache I had Saturday night and yesterday was enough to drive me mad.

After Miss B—— went out of the kitchen Boydie took the handkerchief off his neck, and he and young Ted sat laughing at me. Neither of them knew I had been holding on to the rope with my hands; they both thought I had it tied round my shoulders. When they saw me my hands were stretched by my sides, the fingers just moving convulsively. It was very dark, so they could not see that I was hanging by my neck. At last Ted said, 'Come on, we'll cut him down,' and was very nearly letting me down whop. They made some delay, and Miss B—— came back and said, 'This is beyond a joke, Mr. Boake,' and still they thought I was shamming; so they cut me down, and it was not till they took the handkerchief off and found I was black in the face, and blood oozing from the mouth, that they found out it was no joke, but real earnest.

I can tell you I gave them a fright. It took nearly half-an-hour to bring me to. I think a very few seconds would have cooked me. Of course, I suppose I was a damn fool to put the rope round my neck, but still a fellow often does things without thinking, but they don't always have such awful consequences. I am as right as the bank now, barring a red ring round my neck and a big splotch under my left ear where the knot came—so you need not be frightened; but my sensations were so curious that I wish I could explain them to you more accurately.

Give my love to Grannie and Addie, and write soon. I have not heard from you for a long time.

Your loving son,

BARTIE.

It is interesting to compare this account with one which is the best example of Boake's meditated prose style. Nearly four years later, and some six weeks before his death, he paid a visit to Darlinghurst Gaol, Sydney, and subsequently penned the following sketch, left among his papers, and published in *The Bulletin* of 28th May, 1892, a few days after his body had been found hanging to a tree on the shore of Middle Harbour.

A BAD QUARTER OF AN HOUR.

I stood on the gallows the other day and read—neatly painted on a beam—the names of those men whom a well-meaning Government has thence helped on their way to the happy hunting-grounds. Unfortunately it was daylight at the time of my visit; otherwise I am convinced that I should have been vouchsafed an opportunity of comparing notes with one or more of those gentlemen who, like myself, have enjoyed the advantages of a short shrift and a long rope.

I have had what the author of 'Our Mutual Friend' calls 'a turn-up with death' at various periods of a somewhat chequered existence; but never was the contest so prolonged, or the result so doubtful, as on the following occasion.

Never mind the why, when, or how of the matter: let it suffice that the noose tightened around my throat and severed my connection with the outer world. I no longer possessed a body: nothing was left of me but my head; and that reposed in the centre of a vast cycloramic enclosure whose walls, inscribed with the names and signs of the various arts and sciences, spun round with a waving, snakelike motion that made my eyes throb with a violent pain—nor could I turn them away, hypnotised as I was by the giddy horror of that resistless velocity.

As I stared at those flying columns of dancing figures I was overwhelmed by a sense of the inutility of man's existence: I perceived the absurdity of his aspirations and the poverty of his knowledge. I reviewed the progress of the centuries—not mentally, but actually—inscribed in detail upon the moving walls of that amphitheatre; and then, just as the triumphant thought came to me that I was about to be vouchsafed a peep into futurity, something snapped, the light died away, and I felt myself sinking down . . . down . . . down . . .

* * * *

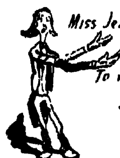
I was on board a ferry-boat which lay near the Milson's Point wharf—the old one where, as a child, I used to watch for my father. I knew perfectly what had happened: we had crashed into one of the outstanding piers, and were sinking fast. I could hear the wash of the waves as they danced over the sponson and broke on the deck, and found myself struggling for life among a mad crowd of shrieking women and shouting men. Suddenly the clank of the engines ceased; and with a scream I leaped towards the land—just in time—for the boiler burst with a roar, scattering boat and passengers to the four winds . . .

I was lying on the floor: friends were round me rubbing my hands and dashing water over my face. I knew what had happened—I was dying; the sword had fallen at last. The doctor always said my heart was affected: now I knew him to be right. Was this Death? How strange it felt to be going . . . going . . . ! 'Oh! but I didn't want—I wouldn't die! I hadn't said good-bye to Jessie. Where is she?—quick! quick! Oh! I can't breathe! What's pressing my chest? Let me up! Oh! oh!' . . . and I came to life.

They had cut me down in the nick of time. It was only a matter of seconds: I was so far on my journey to the other world that it took half an hour of rubbing and pumping to recall me to earth. They tell me that my first words were

A FEW VERSES

With appropriate illustrations



Miss Jean I've commanded
My faltering Muse
To write you some verses:
She dare not refuse



It's your Birthday and what's
More appropriate on it.
Than that I should sit down
And write you a sonnet



I've sat down and now
I don't know what to say
Oh! I know "Many happy
Returns of the day



I must not pay compliments
More is the pity
I know you'd object to be
Told that you're pretty



Shall I tell you you're plain
No! my pen wouldn't write it
Besides there's your anger
I dare not excite it



Miss Jean do you know
That my poor feeble brain
I fear will succomb
To this terrible strain



7

You'll be sorry_ I know
Some day when you find
That writing to you
Drove me out of my mind



8

When you find (to use Scotch)
I've a bee in my bonnet
The horrid result of this
Broken-backed Sonnet

Miss Jean I fear these scanty lines
Your anger may provoke
Deal gently with me for I sign
Yours humbly B. H. B——

This reproduces, on a somewhat smaller scale, a pen-and-ink drawing by Boake in a Rosedale scrap-book. I fancy that the figures are imitated from some by a more skilful hand.—ED.

singularly appropriate to the occasion: as I opened my eyes I smiled and murmured cheerfully, 'Ain't I a fool!'—an opinion of my conduct which I still retain.

The foregoing account of my short excursion to the debatable land 'twixt life and death reads tamely enough on paper, and in fact has but one very questionable recommendation, that of truth.

Boake had agreed to stay with Mr. Commins for two years; and when, towards the close of 1888, the time expired, he was wholly under the spell of the Bush. At times he complained of its monotony, its hardships; but he always added that he could not again endure a city life. So, although urged to return to Sydney by his father, who wished him to qualify to obtain his license as surveyor, he preferred to take service as boundary-rider at Mullah Station, near Trangie, in the Narromine district. He was influenced by a reluctance to commit himself wholly to a surveyor's career, for though an excellent draughtsman, and fairly competent in the field, his heart was not in the work.

The parting from the friends at Rosedale was affectionate and sad. Boake promised to come back in three years, with a pocket full of money, and then——! His hopes were never to be realised. As the months passed, and one by one rosy dream-castles faded, his constitutional melancholy intensified to morbid gloom. He became more and more despondent, self-absorbed, careless of externals. And at last he ceased to struggle.

There seems some pathetic prescience in these lines, written by Boake in Miss Jean McKeahnie's scrap-book on the night before he left Rosedale.

GOOD-BYE. 12TH AUGUST, 1888.

Rosedale, my other home, to you I bid
Regretfully one lingering, sad farewell.
We two have met as on that mountain stream
Which, clearly flowing, bathes your furrowed fields,
Two leaflets meet and gently glide along
In friendly company, linked side by side,
When, lo! an eddy or a hidden rock
Remorselessly doth tear them far apart:
Perchance it leaves one stranded on the bank
To shrivel up and wither in the sun,
And bears the other on its widening stream
To fate unknown.

So, Rosedale, you remain, while I go on,
Launched on that treacherous stream that men call Life,
Which bears them helpless over spray-wrapt falls,
O'er sparkling shallows and deep, gloomy pools,
To strand them in oblivion whence they sprung.

It may be that Life's stream, by some strange freak,
May turn and bring me back to clasp again
Your hands outstretched to welcome my return;
To see once more the crossing at the stream,
The green of drooping willows and the plain
Fringed by its border of bold wooded hills;—
Once more at early morn to see the mist
Drawn from the river's bosom by the sun
Lift up to heaven and vanish like a dream;
Or in the evening by the genial fire,
In merry cadence hear your voices rise,
Telling of pleasures past and joys to come.

But, if I come not, in some idle hour
You may with loit'ring finger turn this page,
Then pause awhile, and give one kindly thought
To him who writes at parting his last prayer—
God guard you! and—good-bye!

From Adaminaby to Trangie is roughly 300 miles; and Boake, who knew nothing of the country, had to find his road as he went. With him travelled young Boyd (affectionately called 'Boydie'), who had been his associate under Mr. Commins. Each had only one horse; and a letter to a friend at Rosedale, dated from Mullah in September, 1888, gives some idea of the difficulties of the journey.

. . . We left Ann's Vale two Sundays after we left you. It was a great 'chuck-in' for us stopping there: it did our horses a lot of good. In fact, if it had not been for that we would never have seen Trangie. Besides, Boydie and I were both getting full of travelling: it is not much of a lark, I can assure you.

We got on very well after we left Burrowa, till we got to Molong, where we were going to turn off to go to Dubbo. I knew there must be some shorter road, but did not know where to find it out. Just by the merest chance I went into a baker's for some bread, and happened to ask the man; and, by good luck, he told us he had been up here and knew all the country. So he directed us how to go a back road which cut off a day's journey; but the country was awfully dry—not a blade of grass—and our last day before getting to Narromine we rode the whole day and never saw a blade the whole twenty miles—nothing but the bare ground covered with leaves.

To crown all, we pushed on to get to Narromine for a camp, and got there just at dark, having to turn out at the

first place we came to—and in the morning our horses were gone! Well, I sent Boydie one way to enquire if they had gone back through the town, and I went the other way. I walked from eight o'clock till eleven; came back and saw Boydie; no news. I started straight away again and walked till three o'clock, when I came home and had some dinner; and, by Jove! wasn't I tired! Well, I had a rest till four, and started again, and did not get back till eight o'clock. It took me two hours to come the last two miles. I was never so knocked up in my life. I did not seem to care whether I ever got back. I felt I would have gladly died straight away. Besides, I felt so miserable. To get on so well till just within twenty miles of our destination, and then to meet with a knock like that! If you could have seen me crawling along, hardly able to drag one foot after another, I am sure you would have pitied me. I can assure you I pitied myself.

Well, next day I started out again, but I was so stiff it was misery to walk. Boydie went out to Trangie by rail to see if he could get the loan of a horse from C——. This was on Wednesday. I was just mooching back with some water for tea when I met Boydie with a smile all over his face, and he told me he had not been able to get a horse, but had heard of ours—they had been seen seven miles back on the road we had come, and were going straight away.

Well, we could not get a horse high or low, so the lad started after them on foot. He did not start till after dark, and got five miles on the road, and turned back. He had my heavy boots on, and they blistered his feet, so he took them off and footed it back barefoot. By George! he was about full of it when he got back.

The next day I started at daylight, and, as luck would have it, found them just where Boydie had turned back. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw them feeding up towards me. I fetched them back quick, and we packed up and shook the dust of Narromine off our feet; and I hope I never set eyes on it again . . .

At the date of the next letter (November, 1888), Boake is busily employed at Mullah.

. . . For the last three weeks we have been camped out lamb-marking and mustering, and I have not been in at the station once during that time except one day to get a fresh horse. We are working very hard at the camp from four o'clock in the morning to dark. I shall be glad when it is over and we can settle down again.

Boydie went to Sydney last Monday. He was very glad to get out of the dust and heat. My word! it is getting hot now. Last Sunday, at four in the afternoon, it was 98° in the shade. It is a terror working in the yards now, but it is nothing to what we got putting out a bush fire the other day. We were all drafting when Will Chapman came galloping up to tell us there was a fire coming across the paddock about a mile away. We all made a rush for horses, and galloped off like mad along a swamp where the grass is four or five feet high, and as dry as a bone. There was a wall of fire coming across like the side of a house. You could not get near the front of it, so we had to start at the sides, and one would rush in with a bush and beat it out till the smoke drove him back, and then another would take his place. After about half an hour I was nearly dead. It was a boiling hot day to start with; and what with the heat of the fire, and smoke, and no water, it was worse than anything I ever experienced before. We stopped the fire by lighting another one in front, and letting it burn back . . .

I am still doing the same old ride round the paddocks. I generally take a rifle now, and shoot kangaroos when I see any . . .

Have a stiff neck from sleeping in the verandah last night. I always sleep there now, so as to get up early. One does not want bed-clothes. I just chuck a rug down and a pillow, and camp on that; and as the day breaks I saddle my horse and off. The only things that disturb me are the

'possums. They run up and down the verandah and squeak the whole night. One ran up and sat on the eave of the house, and incautiously let his tail dangle over the edge, and I sneaked up and caught hold of it—and if he didn't jump! He must be going yet.

A month later (10th December, 1888), Mullah is waiting anxiously for the drought to break. Boake writes to his father—

. . . I don't feel the heat nearly so much as I expected: in fact, I can stand it with much less inconvenience than I could the cold of Monaro. The only thing I feel is the thirst: I never seem to be satisfied.

Times are pretty easy now. Most of the work is over among the sheep, and all I have to do is to ride round about twenty miles of the boundary and see that no sheep are getting bogged at the water. I generally make a start about four in the morning, when it is cool, and get back about ten o'clock. After that, as a rule, I have nothing to do for the rest of the day except pass the time reading, unless I feel inclined to take a ride round the lagoon about sundown . . .

A characteristic letter from Boake to his father may be quoted in full.

Mullah, Trangie,
29th December, 1888.

My dear Father,—Your last letter must assuredly have miscarried, as it is two months or more since I heard from you. From the tone of your letter I should say that the world is treating you better than hitherto. It is about time too.

So there is another inhabitant added to this continent. Poor little beggar! I wonder if he will ever wish he had never been born, like most of us do. I think it is a natural

consequence of being face to face with Nature so continually, but the great mystery of human nature often comes before me as I ride about. It seems to me so sad and so disheartening—to toil, with the knowledge of the vanity of it all in our hearts. Civilisation is a dead failure: it only brings these truths more forcibly before us: a savage never thinks of these things.

I have been reading a book that gives expression exactly to the ideas I have been trying to set down here. It is one of Rider Haggard's, called 'Allan Quatermain.' This, and the one to which it is a sequel, are really worth getting if you want a real good soul-stirring account of a battle told in most animated and picturesque language. But the best part, to my thinking, lies in two pages of the introduction, which is a sort of little philosophical essay in itself.*

I have very easy times now—far too easy, in fact. The less I have to do the more time I have to grumble. Good hard work—physical labour—is the best panacea imaginable for a discontented mind. When I used to be in the yards in the heat and dust all I would think of was how to do the work well and expeditiously and have done with it; but now, from eleven o'clock in the morning I have absolutely nothing to do but kill time. I am up early, and my riding is done by

* I quote a few sentences to show the drift of this:—'Ah! this civilisation, what doesit all come to? . . . It is a depressing conclusion, but in all essentials the savage and the child of civilisation are identical . . . Civilisation is only savagery silver-gilt. . . So, when the heart is stricken, and the head is humbled in the dust, civilisation fails us utterly. Back, back, we creep, and lay us like little children on the great breast of Nature, that she perchance may soothe us and make us forget, or at least rid remembrance of its sting. Who has not in his great grief felt a longing to look upon the outward features of the universal Mother; to lie on the mountains and watch the clouds drive across the sky, and hear the rollers break in thunder on the shore; to let his poor struggling life mingle for awhile in her life; to feel the slow beat of her eternal heart, and to forget his woes, and let his identity be swallowed in the vast imperceptibly, moving energy of her of whom we are,' etc.—ED.

ten or eleven; and I find it very hard to pass the time away; but I believe this will all be over soon, as the stock out back will be in great straits for water soon, and then our joy begins.

I have read your advice, and I wish for your sake and Grannie's I could bring myself to follow it. But oh! I should smother if I were to go back to Sydney again: I should have no heart. There is a curious phenomenon in stock-breeding called 'throwing back.' After years and years of careful breeding, you will sometimes find a beast born with all the characteristics of the original stock. In the same way, I believe some of the wild blood of our savage Irish ancestors has been transmitted to me. At any rate, my home is in the bush; and as no good is to be done but on the confines of the settled country, that is where I hope to go within the next year.

I had just finished a letter to Grannie this afternoon just before receiving this of yours. I enclose a slip of paper for her in this. Give my love to all.—Your affectionate son,
BARTIE.

(By the bye, I have dropped that, and now adopt the commoner one of Thomas.)

By April, 1889, the monotony of life at Mullah had become unendurable, and at the beginning of May Boake left on a roving expedition northwards. He was accompanied by two brothers named Boyd, one of whom has been previously mentioned as coming with him from Monaro. All three were young and strong, used to a bush life and eager for adventure; and they proposed to carry out Boake's idea of going 'on the confines of the settled country' where 'good is to be done'—that is, where work was easier to obtain, and wages were higher. Moving by easy

stages, on 10th May they had reached Brewarrina, some 200 miles from Mullah, on the main stock road from Queensland. Here they 'spelled' for a few days, proceeding then towards Barringun with an eye open for a job with travelling stock. And on 16th June Boake writes from Thylungrah, in Queensland, saying that he is going with a drover to the Diamantina to bring back a mob of cattle.

On 11th August Boake writes to his father from Currawilla, Q., reciting some of his first droving experiences—

. . . We are kept going so continually that it is with great difficulty I can snatch these few minutes to let you know I am alive. We are on the road now with eleven hundred head of cattle for Cunnamulla, from Devonport,* Diamantina river. We were five weeks mustering on the station.

. . . The cattle have to be watched all night . . . I am lucky, and have the first—from six to eight. Still, as we are going from before daylight of a morning, it makes the hours pretty long. Fourteen hours a day I reckon I have in the saddle, straight off.

. . . Still, this is the only life worth living that I see. No more New South Wales for me, except for a visit. This is the only place where a poor man can get a cheque together in a short time . . .

And the letter closes with 'love to Grannie and the girls.'

To this period of his life Boake always looked back with keen pleasure. He was now 23 years old,

* Apparently Davenport Downs.

in the prime of youth. No portrait gives a complete idea of him, but at this time he was changing from the bright lad suggested on page 164 to the more thoughtful man of whom one gets a hint in the frontispiece. Boake matured slowly, and to the last there was a touch of boyishness in his nature and appearance. In figure he was slim and loosely-knit, rather tall than short. 'He looked infinitely better on a horse than off,' says his friend Raymond. His eyes were dark, his hair dark-brown, almost black; and his face was made remarkable by a deep scar on the right brow, the result of a fall in childhood. I have called him 'listless, shy, moody, dispirited.' Listless he seemed often in the Monaro days, and sometimes dispirited; but rather reserved than shy. The moodiness came later.

On 29th August the mob had reached Windorah, and Boake writes—

Dear Father . . . Enclosed you will find a note in pencil. I don't know if you will be able to decipher it. The day I wrote it I was very sick, and was bad for three days with a touch of a fever they get out here. At present I have very bad eyes from the flies and dust: everyone gets it.

. . . This is a regular dog's life. Breakfast by starlight; with the cattle till dark; then get up in the night to do two hours' watch. Still, it has its charms. As a song of ours says—

Still his wild, roving life with its hardships is dear
To the heart of each wandering bush cavalier.

About those letters of intro. It was very good of you to go to so much trouble about me. I don't deserve it, really. I am very sorry I never got them.

. . . Give my dear love to Grannie and the girls. I often think of you on watch. I am getting good wages; and with a bit of luck, if I get in so far this trip, will see you for a few days somewhere after Xmas.—Your affectionate son, BARTIE.

About the middle of October, the cattle were delivered at Cobb and Co.'s station, Burrenbilla, near Cunnamulla (Q.); and Boake writes to his father from that address—

21st October, 1889.

. . . We let the bullocks go yesterday, and went to bed last night with the strange feeling that we had no watch to do. However, it won't be for long; for we start to-morrow for the Yowah, another of Cobb's stations about 80 miles from here, to bring in a mob of fat cows, which will be drafted here, and then go on to Bathurst. In all probability I shall go with them, so that is four months of the future mapped out. I have a new boss now: the man I came in from the Diamantina with is not going to get any more cattle to drove—he loses too many.

2nd November.

. . . I had to leave this to go after horses, and have not had time to continue until to-day. We are out at the Yowah now, very busy mustering; and hope to be away next week some time. They had to knock off to-day to shoe horses, as they are nearly all too footsore from the stones. It is very rough country here—nothing but stones and scrub—a bit different to the Diamantina, where it is nothing but plains. The cattle here are as wild as hawks, and we are galloping all day long.

The first day we went out to camp about ten miles away. We just took pack-horses, and, as it was very hot, only a blanket apiece. In the middle of the night it started to rain hard, and I lay in two inches of water till morning. Nobody had any coats—only shirts and pants on. We were quite

unprepared for any bad weather. We had a job to light a fire, and it was infernally cold; but it cleared up after breakfast. Anthony Trollope, in one of his books about Australia, says: 'The life of the Australian bushman is one continual picnic.' He would not have said so if he had put in that night alongside of me.

Oh, well! I suppose a man reaps as he sows. I often grumble at these sort of things, but at the same time console myself by the thought that it was my own choosing. I might have been jogging along in monotonous respectability as a civil servant; but they don't live, these men—they only vegetate. We have a pleasure and excitement in our work that they never feel. Every day brings something new: no two are alike. There is a charm about this life always in the saddle only those can appreciate who have lived it.

I got dear Grannie's letter. This must do for her and Addie as well as you, for I have to go up to the station presently. I am afraid Grannie must be getting very feeble. Dear old lady! won't she be glad to see her good-for-naught grandson again! I often think about my prospective trip to Sydney when between the blankets, with the mosquitoes singing a sweet lullaby round my head. I have not decided yet whether I am going to surprise you at Croydon or in town. Don't be surprised if you see a lanky young man with a cabbage-tree hat on walk into the office and say 'Hello, Dad!'—for that will be me. I have not altered a bit in appearance—at least, not that I can see. Some time in February we hope to be in Bathurst, when I may be able to run down for a few days.

I got a letter from Addie telling me about her little girl Doris. It is a pretty name. Fancy these two girls married and mothers! It will be right enough as long as they stop at one; but I have seen too many when I was in the Survey with big families and small salaries. Better to keep single than to drag your wife down to the level of a household drudge as many do. Well, my dear Dad, I must say Good-

bye. I have a little while yet, but I must devote that to a letter to Mrs. McKeahnie, as they have not heard from me for a long time. Give my love to Grannie and Addie and the girls.

Hoping to see you all in a few months' time.—Your affectionate son, BARTIE.

The Yowah cattle were mustered and brought to Burrenbilla to rest for two or three weeks before the journey to Bathurst. Boake was paid off, with the promise of a job when the cattle started; and came into Cunnamulla to wait for them. Thence he writes to his grandmother on 18th November, 1889—

. . . I have not heard from any of my girls for a long time now; but I told them not to write, as I did not know where I might be. I am staying in this town for a fortnight until Mr. Leeds comes back to start a mob of cattle away to Bathurst. I hope to go with them. It is getting very hot and dry here now, and the sooner I turn my back on Banana-land for a few months the better I will be pleased.

. . . I am enjoying the unaccustomed luxuries of clean sheets and mosquito curtains. It seems quite strange to sleep in a bed once more; but I wish I was on the road again. Lying about doing nothing but smoke does not suit me at all.

Two days later (20th November, 1889), Boake writes to his father—

. . . I feel very lonely here—a stranger in a far land; and the time hangs very heavy.

He refers to the episode of the lost £100 narrated on page 165, and proceeds—

Only for that I would in all probability be in Sydney now. It is strange how easily the current of our life is turned. I don't think in Sydney I could have found the pleasure in

life that exists for me here—that is, at times: oftener I feel sick of the whole thing and long for some other country and a more stirring life.

There is a pleasure in a mad gallop; or in watching the dawn of day on a cattle camp—to see the beasts take shape, and change from an indistinguishable mass of white and black into their natural colours; in the dead of night to find yourself alone with the cattle—all the camp asleep, perhaps only a red spark betokening the camp. I always, when I think of it, find something unearthly in this assemblage of huge animals ready at any moment to burst forth like a pent-up torrent, and equally irresistible in their force. When every beast is down, asleep or resting, just pull up and listen. You will hear a low moaning sound rising to a roar, then subsiding to a murmur like distant surf—or, as I fancy, the cry of the damned in Dante's 'Inferno.' When the cattle are like that it is a good sign. But in the moonlight this strange noise, the dark mass of cattle with the occasional flash of an eye or a polished horn catching the light—it always conjures up strange fancies in me: I seem to be in some other world.

If I could only write it, there is a poem to be made out of the back country. Some man will come yet who will be able to grasp the romance of Western Queensland and all that equally mysterious country in Central and Northern Australia. For there is a romance, though a grim one—a story of drought and flood, fever and famine, murder and suicide, courage and endurance.

And who reaps the benefit? Not the poor bushman; but Messrs. So-and-So, merchants, of Sydney or Melbourne—or the Mutual Consolidated Cut-down-the-drovers'-wages Company, Limited—or some other capitalist. If you showed them the map half of them could not point out the position of their runs. All they know is that their cheques come in regularly from the buyers; and if the expenses pass the limit *they* in their ignorance place, they sack the manager and get another easy enough.

I often wonder if a day will come when these men will rise up—when the wealthy man, perhaps renowned inside* for his benevolence, shall see pass before him a band of men—all of whom died in his service, and whose unhallowed graves dot his run—the greater portion hollow, shrunken, burning with the pangs of thirst—others covered with the evil slime of the Diamantina, Cooper, and those far western rivers—burnt unrecognisably in bush fires, struck down by sunstroke, ripped up by cattle, dashed against some tree by their horses, killed in a dozen different ways—and what for? A few shillings a week; and these are begrudged them. While their employer travels the Continent, and lives in all the luxury his wealth can command, they are sweating out their lives under a tropic sun on damper and beef.

This is no exaggerated picture, I can assure you. Marcus Clarke has grasped the meaning of Australia's mountains and forests in his eloquent preface to Gordon's poems; but neither he nor Gordon has written about the plains and sandhills of the far west—it remains for some future poet to do that.

I got a volume of Gordon here the other day, and at length had an opportunity of studying his writings in their entirety. I have long been familiar with his most well-known poems. There is no man within the last century who has achieved such lasting fame as he has. His poems appeal not only to one class of cultured minds, as Tennyson or Browning and that lot; but there is not a bushman or drover who does not know a verse or two of 'How We Beat the Favourite' or 'The Sick Stock-rider.' I call this fame.

Gordon is the favourite—I may say only poet of the back-blocker; and I am sorry to say Emile Zola is his favourite prose writer. His books are published now in very cheap form, and have a tremendous circulation. A strange partnership indeed, for these two men so different in their tone to share popularity! I am afraid after all the bushman is not a

* *I.e.*, in the coastal district; as opposed to outside, or out back—in the interior.

very fine animal; but at any rate, even in his most vicious moments, he is far above many of the so-called respectable dwellers in towns.

There is now a considerable gap in the series of letters. Shortly after the date of that last quoted, Boake was employed, as he anticipated, to travel with cattle from Cunnamulla to Bathurst, N.S.W. He reached Bathurst in March, 1890: the cattle were delivered; and Boake engaged with the drover in charge to take a fresh job. Coming to Sydney, he spent a week with his family at Croydon, and returned—as arranged—to find that the drover had knocked down his cheque in a roaring spree, and had left Bathurst the day before, after selling some of his horses in order to get away.

Boake was disgusted and indignant; and his father pointed the moral of his situation with such effect that he agreed to turn once more to surveying, and in May, 1890, took service with Mr. W. A. Lipscomb, a surveyor employed in the Riverina territory of New South Wales. With Mr. Lipscomb he remained till the end of 1891, cutting up Government land into portions for lease or sale, and preparing plans of the country dealt with—chiefly in the districts of Wagga Wagga, Urana, Tarcutta, and Tumbarumba.

This was the period of Boake's greatest poetic activity. In boyhood he had been used to cap rhymes with his father; and in later days he had composed

verses at seasons of special emotion, but without taking his talent seriously. Although a facile rhymer, he always preferred dreaming to creating. Now, however, he was excited by the flattery of Riverina society; and when he found that a newspaper with the literary reputation of *The Bulletin* would print and pay for his impressions and fancies, he took more pains to rightly embody them. In the pleasure of composition Boake was at times able to banish gloom and anxiety, and even fitfully to nourish the bright hopes of his Monaro days.

Of Boake at this time Mr. Lipscomb says—

He was a good horseman, and a first-class bushman. When he left me and came to Sydney he intended passing the examination for a license as surveyor, and he was thoroughly qualified to do so. In the field he was sufficiently capable, and he was a particularly good draughtsman. His work in the field-books (outlining the topography of the country) was the best I ever saw. He was very temperate—except in the use of tobacco: his pipe was hardly ever out of his mouth. He was fond of reading, whenever he had the chance: a surveyor's life gives little opportunity for study. I remember his devotion to Shakespeare and *The Bulletin*. His health seemed good; but his habits were solitary, his disposition melancholy—even morose. He made few friends: indeed, the only people I knew him to be friendly with (besides Raymond, my other assistant) were Dr. and Mrs. O'Connor and their daughters, of Connorton, Wagga Wagga.

Mr. L. C. Raymond writes—

I first met Boake when I joined Mr. Lipscomb's survey camp at Terong Creek, N.S.W., in August, 1890; and for sixteen months thereafter we lived and worked together, and

slept for the most part within the same 12′ x 15′ calico walls. My first impression of him was also my final opinion. I thought he was one of the most reserved (even grumpy) individuals I had ever met. Not that I think he was selfish, but he was entirely self-absorbed, and brooding continually. On two subjects he would chat willingly—his pleasant memories of Rosedale station and his joyous days as a drover. When the talk led up to life among the cattle, overlanding, cutting out on the camp and so on, he was all right. *There* he had been happy in his work (he hated surveying); *there* he was again in a moment happy when his thoughts flew back to old times; and *there*, perhaps, he once more would have had happiness had he again handled his stockwhip, not as a means of ending his life, but for the purpose of sustaining and enjoying it.

Boake was brimming over with Adam Lindsay Gordon; and I have no hesitation in saying that Gordon was the father of his poetry. We used to chaffingly call him 'the modern Gordon.' He usually wrote his verses on any odd scraps of paper and copied them carefully into a MS. book, after which they were generally re-written and handed to me to punctuate before being sent for publication. When he wrote 'Jack's Last Muster,' in the metre of 'How We Beat the Favourite,' several remarks passed between us comparing the two poems. I laughingly said: 'You know, if you want to be a second Gordon, you must complete the business properly, and finish up by committing suicide.' He laughed quietly in reply, and I thought no more of it until some fifteen months afterwards, when I read in *The Sydney Morning Herald* first a request for information concerning Boake's whereabouts, as he had been missing some days from his home, and next, a few days later, a paragraph saying that his body had been found hanging by that stockwhip which I know he loved right well. Then I remembered my careless words.

The letters written by Boake at this time show how rapidly he was gathering and associating ideas,

how his literary faculty was stimulated by recognition and praise, and how strongly he vibrated to pathetic or tragic impulses. Unluckily there is a gap in the correspondence preserved, and during 1890 the personal record is a blank. On 11th January, 1891, Boake writes telling how Wagga society appreciated some satirical lines he had composed concerning certain of its members. His good-nature made him perhaps too ready to yield to pressure to 'write some spicy verses' pointing the township gossip; and the flattery he received when these were passed from hand to hand probably blinded him to their aspect of unnecessary malice. Boake was young, however, exulting in the discovery of his unusual talent; and it must be owned that his satire was generally just.

On 16th February, 1891, Boake writes to a sister from the survey camp at Carabosh, near Germanton—

Dear Addie,—To-night is the proudest moment of my life. I feel that at last I have my foot on the first rung of the ladder that leads to fame. I have just got a letter from the editor of *The Bulletin*, acknowledging some verses. This is what he says: it is short, but very sweet—

Dr. Sir,—Shall be glad to publish your pretty and melodious verses: they may be kept for Xmas and illustrated. *Cheque* will follow in due course. Hoping to hear from you shortly. Yrs., &c., J. F. Archibald.

I nearly jumped out of my skin when I got it—I was so surprised . . . This letter is rather egotistical; but I felt I must write to some one or die.—Your loving Bartie.

Yet there is preserved from about this period a fragment of a letter containing the statement: 'I myself

believe with Tolstoi that the sooner the race dies out the better for all concerned.' Boake's physical tendency to melancholy was too strong to be permanently overpowered by any mental reaction.

On 25th July, 1891, Boake writes to his father from the survey camp at Mundawaddery, recording an incident which impressed him deeply—

. . . I suppose you saw by the paper that the floods in this part of the country have been without precedent in the recollection of the oldest settlers. We arrived at Brookong and camped there on the Thursday before the memorable 12th July. It began to rain on Friday, and that night 120 points fell. All day Saturday it poured, and the lamb-markers were working all through it. On Saturday night Mr. Dixon, the sheep-overseer, came in from the camp at Green's Gunyah, and told us that they had been up to the waist in water all that day crossing sheep, and that the creek was rising very fast.

The buildings at Brookong are scattered all over the place; the manager's house, bachelors' quarters, men's huts, and kitchens being down near the creek, while Mr. Halliday's house and garden, the stables, and the office and store, are a couple of hundred yards away. Raymond and I were installed in the old schoolroom, which stands away by itself from the store. We used it for an office, and slept in the bedroom adjoining. Mr. L. had a room in the big house across the garden from us. He used to walk over to Mr. Grierson's (the manager's) house for meals, while we used to go to the barracks.

On Saturday night the water was up in Grierson's back yard; but we never expected to see it as it was on Sunday morning. Staines, the storekeeper, whose room was just opposite the schoolroom, accompanied us down to look for breakfast. In order to get to the barracks we had a hundred

yards of water up to our knees. When we got down, there was six inches of water on the kitchen floor, and it was just commencing to ooze into the dining-room. It was running like a mill-race in the passage between the two houses.

After breakfast Syd. Welman, Staines, and I got the boat out and started to take the letters out to the mail. The mail change is about a mile away, but the water was right over the plain. Syd. and I took the oars, and away we went. All the time it was pouring in torrents and blowing half a gale. It was great fun pulling over the tops of fences and dams in and out among the trees, but we could not get right over to the road. We got the boat stuck, and had to get out and pull her along. Now and again we'd come to a deep gutter, and down one of us would go over his head. It was beginning to get rather chilly by the time the coach came along. It would have made a striking picture: the boat in foreground and the scarlet coach with its four horses coming towards us—sometimes with the water over the wheels and horses almost swimming—and then, as far as the eye could reach, the plain one sheet of water. We were wishing we could have had a photo. of the scene.

I tell you, when we got back to Brookong we were glad to get dry things on. We three started a fire in the school-room and stayed there. The water rose all day, and at night they were rowing the boat between Grierson's house and our residence. At eight o'clock Sunday night it was into the store, and we had to turn to and shift two tons of flour and one of sugar into a place of safety. The lamb-markers had all come into the station, and everything seemed pretty safe as far as the men were concerned.

. . . We went to bed on Sunday night with three inches of water in our rooms. It never rose any higher, and on Monday was beginning to fall. Then the bad news came. A man coming in from Green's Gunyah hotel, where the lamb-markers had been camped, reported finding two of them dead on the main road about two miles from Brookong. Some

of them had left the public-house to come in on Sunday in a waggonette. They were all drunk, and these two unfortunates had dropped out of the cart and lain there and perished—how, can never be ascertained. The coroner would not come out: he was afraid of the creek. He wired out to bury them, and held an enquiry a week afterwards; but their comrades swore that they were all so drunk they remembered nothing. Yet they were able to drive ten miles in that fearful storm, and never hit a tree or miss a gate.

On Monday night news came in from the out-station that a young fellow named Arthur Biscay was missing They had been scouring the country, but it was not until Tuesday that they found him, also lying dead in the bush. They had all left the Gunyah together, but Arthur had slipped away from them and was never missed. He was riding a young thing, and the general opinion is that he got off and it pulled away from him; for they found a lot of hoof-marks of a struggling horse, and also Arthur's hat. When it got away he walked on and on until he got exhausted and fell down. He then dragged himself along on his stomach for about a hundred yards, and then, burying his face in his hands, lay to sleep—and never woke. He was a fine young fellow, a great horseman, and the most popular man on the station.

They would not bury him until the parson could come out, which was on Wednesday. Every man on the station was at the funeral. Including visitors, there were ninety men followed his body to its grave at the wool-wash. We drove; but all who had no horses had to wade through mud and water up to their knees. It was a most impressive ceremony, rendered so by the earnestness of Arthur's comrades, who had worked with him, played with him, and whose rough hands had fashioned his coffin and dug his grave, and who now followed him to it in the silence of the brilliant morning, broken only by the shrill tolling of the bell which had rung him and them out to work so many times. They put the coffin in a low waggonette: one of them perched himself on

the side and drove the horses. Two poor little wreaths of jonquils and geraniums, twined with the lustrous leaves of the kurrajong—all the flowers afforded by the garden—reposed on the shell. The buggies fell into line, the horsemen and footmen four deep, and the cortège moved off down the creek. The most pathetic touch in the whole thing was that one of the boundary-riders led Arthur's horse immediately behind the remains of its master, saddled, with the stirrups crossed dejectedly over its back. Its presence brought so sharply home the fact of its one-time rider's absence. We take Death as a matter of course, and a slight thing such as that serves to remind us of its awful reality.

Everybody was very much affected at the grave. I saw one young fellow crying manfully: I, for one, was not very far off it. The three victims of that awful night lie side by side in the little knot of graves on Brookong Creek; but I think it will be many a long day before the recollection of the 12th July, 1891, fades from the minds of the dwellers in Riverina. I have only spoken of what came within my own experience; but every station was flooded, and lives lost besides those at Brookong.

. . . I was very pleased to hear of Evie's success. I suppose the scholarship entitles her to go to the High School for a certain period, and prepare for the University. I wish to God I could change places with her . . . I have very little time at present for writing—I do long sometimes to be able to sit down quietly and write, but everything I do is done in snatches. To have a quiet room with an easy chair and a desk, and no one to disturb me, is the height of my never-to-be-gratified ambition.

I ought to have written to dear Grannie, but I have spun this out so long that there is no time. You must give this to her to read instead . . . Give my love to Addie and the girls.—Yours affectionately, BARTIE.

Boake wrote some unremarkable verses 'In Memoriam, Arthur Biscay,' and sent them to *The Albury*

Banner, which had published a short time previously a metrical address 'To "Rolf Boldrewood"'—Boake's first printed composition. The latter to some extent echoes Gordon's dedication to 'Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes'—itself an echo of Swinburne's dedication to 'Poems and Ballads'—and commences:

I cannot climb Fame's tower and ring
  An ever-sounding chime;
I only have the art to string
  Poor phrases into rhyme:
Nor can I strike that subtle chord
Of melody flung heavenward,
Like those whose names are deeply scored
  Upon the walls of time.

However faint, I yet may catch
  A gentle undertone;
However humble, yet a snatch
  Of song to call my own—
An echo from that Alpine height
Too steep for me, yet still in sight,
Where, emulating swallow flight,
  The songs of these have flown.

Ten verses follow referring to scenes in 'Rolf Boldrewood's' novels, and the address closes—

Chieftain! whose banner is unfurled
  Upon the Murray's banks;
You who throughout the lettered world
  Have won undying thanks—
A veteran's honours on your breast:
Deal gently by these lines addressed
By one who must remain at best
  A private in the ranks.

On 19th October, 1891, Boake writes from the camp at 'The Rock'—

My Dear Father,—Did you ever lie on your back in the sun and have beautiful thoughts, that you can't put into words, come to you? That is what I was doing this evening. You just lie down and fix your eyes on the red crest of the old rock, and wait. Presently you feel yourself melting away, and then the body stops behind and away you go—somewhere—I don't know where—fairy-land, I suppose—that's where all the lovely things come from. Some men go and bring back beautiful stories; others, poetry: some only wake up with a sigh, and have the recollection. I was thinking how nice it would be if one could always stay young, and not have too much work to do, and just lie in the sun. But then the sun doesn't always shine: besides, it would get monotonous. This is *apropos* of nothing at all; only I have just been musing under the stars while I waited for one gentleman named Achenar to come to his E. elongation. We are having the most perfect weather possible: it is simply joy to be alive. If it would only always be spring!

In December, 1891, Boake's engagement with Mr. Lipscomb ended, and he came to stay with his father and sisters at Croydon, Sydney: walking in unexpectedly one morning with a light portmanteau, and a 'possum-rug swag strapping up a few small articles—amongst them the lash of a stockwhip. His father continues the story—

When Bartie wrote to say that Mr. Lipscomb was breaking up camp, and he intended coming to Sydney, my heart sank within me, and I wished something might happen to deter him. The presentiment of evil was not without cause. I felt that he was coming full of spirits to a house of gloom, and

feared the effect of my own despondency upon his sensitive nature. For my business had failed and left me embarrassed with debt, and I saw no prospect of re-establishing myself. So my welcome to him was dashed with bitterness; and, though I strove to conceal it, my depression must have made itself apparent.

One evening, shortly after his arrival, he came out to me on the verandah with his pipe, and said: 'Addie tells me things are not very blooming with you, Dad. Well, I've got £50, and that will square off the household debts, at all events.' I accepted the money after a faint struggle, being vaguely conscious that I was wrong to do so; and he paid it into my bank account next day.

He was for a few days alert, cheerful, and happy; and he had what in one of his letters he expresses a wish for—'a quiet room and an easy chair' to sit at work in; but gradually I could see that the oppression of the surroundings made itself felt. He thought he could get some small employment sufficient to keep him going; but he was so wanting in 'push' and pretension that he soon saw this was next to impossible His grandmother was invalided and confined to her bed; and family troubles helped to weigh us down. I myself was hopeless about everything, and quite unfit to cope with the melancholia that I plainly saw oppressed him. I have sat in a room with him for perhaps hours at a time, silent, and enraged with myself that I could not say something cheerful. I have made efforts to rouse him, but their stilted artificiality only sickened me the more, and produced no effect upon Bartie. Once I suggested that he should join me in business somewhere in the country. He just raised his head, but answered never a word.

He remained with us from December till May, his only earnings being a few guineas received for odd contributions to *The Bulletin*. His last composition was 'An Easter Rhyme,' published in that journal on 7th May, 1892.

AN EASTER RHYME.

Easter Monday in the city—
Rattle, rattle, rumble, rush!
Tom and Jerry, Nell and Kitty,
All the down-the-harbour 'push'—
Little thought have they, or pity,
For a wanderer from the bush.

Shuffle, feet, a merry measure!
Hurry, Jack, and find your Jill!
Let her—if it give her pleasure—
Flaunt her furbelow and frill!
Kiss her while you have the leisure;
For to-morrow brings the mill.

Go ye down the harbour winding
'Mid the eucalypts and fern,
Respite from your troubles finding:
Kiss her till her pale cheeks burn;
For to-morrow will the grinding
Millstones of the city turn.

Stunted figures, sallow faces,
Sad girls striving to be gay
In their cheap sateens and laces . . .
Ah! how different 'tis to-day
Where they're going to the races
Yonder—up Monaro way!

Light mist flecks the Murrumbidgee's
Bosom with a silver stain:
On the trembling wire bridge is
Perched a single long-legged crane;
While the yellow, slaty ridges
Sweep up proudly from the plain.

Somebody is after horses—
  Donald, Charlie, or young Mac—
Suddenly his arm he tosses;
  Presently you'll hear the crack,
As the symbol of the cross is
  Made on Possum's steaming back.

Stirling first! the Masher follows—
  Ly-ee-moon and old Trump Card;
Helter-skelter through the shallows
  Of the willow-shaded ford:
Up the lane and past the gallows,
  Driven panting to the yard.

In the homestead, what a clatter!
  Habits black and habits blue.
Full a dozen red lips patter:
  'Who is going to ride with who?'
Mixing sandwiches and chatter;
  Gloves to button, hair to do.

Horses stamp and stirrups jingle,
  'Dash the filly! won't she wait?'
Voices, bass and treble, mingle.
  '*Look* sharp, May, or we'll be late!'
How the pulses leap and tingle
  As you lift her featherweight!

At the thought the heart beats quicker
  Than an old Bohemian's should—
Beating like my battered ticker
  (Pawned this time, I fear, for good).
Bah! I'll go and have a liquor
  With the genial Jimmy Wood.

The comparison between city and country indicates whither his thoughts were turning. It was his habit to show me his

verses before sending them for publication, but he never showed me this piece.

About this time he received a letter from the country, and in reference to it said to one of his sisters: 'I have had rather a knock to-day. I hear that my best girl is going to be married.' He said no more than this, and this much was unusual; for, beyond general impressions, he never confided his loves or friendships to any of us.

Things had gone from bad to worse, till I had given up making any effort to rouse him. In his state of mind at that time he could not have had a worse companion than myself. The sight of him was a pain to me, and probably to see me pained him; and our deep mutual affection made matters worse. For the last fortnight in April he used to come into my office daily to assist me in any small way; but I had really nothing for him to do.

The last time I saw him in life was at breakfast on 2nd May, 1892. As usual, I was moodily and silently leaving the room, and I glanced furtively at him (as I often did—I suppose in the hope of seeing some improvement). He raised his head, and our eyes met. This was so rare that I remarked it; and the effect remained with me for some few moments after leaving the room. Had I been a woman I should have returned and by some means or other extorted his confidence; for there was meaning in his glance, though he himself may not have intended it. I now know it was his farewell.

The next eight days passed in enquiries as to his whereabouts, but I soon felt sure that the discovery would only be a miserable one. His grandmother and I used to discuss his absence, only disagreeing as to the 'how.' She said his body would be found in the harbour. I said No, for he was a swimmer, and swimmers do not usually drown themselves. Yet my revolver was in its place; and I knew Bartie had none.

On 10th May, as I came to my office, I saw one of the Water Police at the door, and realised that the end had come. My mind naturally turned to drowning, and it was some time before the man made the mode of death clear to me. The place Bartie chose was on the shore of Long Bay, one of the arms of Middle Harbour. His body was found, suspended by the lash of his stockwhip from the limb of a tree, by a man engaged in clearing the bush for a proposed sewer. So secluded was the spot that he might otherwise have hung there for months.

At the coroner's inquest a verdict of suicide was returned. I was required to identify the body, which I could only do by the letters 'F.E.B.' (his mother's initials) tattooed on the left arm by Assimul, a black-boy from Nouméa. The police handed me two library tickets found in a pocket. On the backs was written in pencil :—

> Dear Father,—Write to Miss McKeahnie.—Your loving son, BARTIE.
>
> Give 'Jack Corrigan' and 'Featherstonhaugh' to Mr. Archibald ; he will pay you for them.

I did as desired, and had the body conveyed to the North Sydney cemetery, where it was buried.

Boake's suicide was an appeal to Death to end his hopelessness as Life had ended hope. For him, of course, the wisdom of the act was conditioned by the circumstances : he could no other than he did. I have already indicated what those circumstances were. A weak heart and sensitive brain brought him into the Debatable Land : tobacco led him to the edge of the precipice. The memory of the mock hanging at Rocklands was always tempting him to look down the dizzy depths. He looked and drew back ; looked and drew back ;—then, to aid the pressure of

daily worries and the prepossessions of a lifetime came the blow to his lover's dreams, and, looking, he leaped.

The burial-ground where Boake lies is situated in an elevated part of North Sydney, some half-hour's journey from the city proper. It is a small enclosure, thickly studded with the grotesque monuments conventionally associated with grief. Here and there a poorer grave, adorned with shells and coloured pebbles, more impresses the stranger: it is like the rudimentary art of a bower-bird, yet so pitifully earnest. Near the western boundary lies a narrow plot with plain stone kerbing, and this inscription on a marble slab—

26TH MARCH, 1866

BARCROFT HENRY BOAKE

2ND MAY, 1892

And one reflects on the world of impotent potentialities that died with the baffled idealist beneath.

It is no wonder that the Earth
Heaps shining Spring on Spring;
That flowers bud in tender birth,
And ever new birds sing:
This is the harvest-home of woe
From buried ecstasies below.

A mother's hands let flowers fall
   On little graves she loved :
The Earth, who loves and mothers all,
   With the same impulse moved,
Doth sorrowfully every year
Strew flowers above her children dear.

A nation chants a threnody
   For heroes laid to rest :
'T is echoed back eternally
   From Earth's sob-swelling breast.
Listen ! the birds repeat a dirge
For great souls passed beyond the verge.

When youth and maid in blither times,
   When Thoughts were less than Things,
Brought in the May with joyous rhymes,
   Dances and carollings,
The merry month seemed full of cheer ;
But, ah ! 't was borne upon a bier.

And so, to minds attuned with it,
   The eternal rhythm doth sound
Lament for graces infinite
   Hid in the hollow ground :
The most delicious draught of joy
The World-Grief will with tears alloy.

Thus every hope destroyed in life
  In death has left its sign:
The All hath conquerèd in the strife
  Though Each for ever pine:
A moment means eternity,
A sand-speck all infinity,
And from this poor humanity
  We argue the Divine.

Webbdale, Shoosmith & Co., Printers, 117 Clarence Street, Sydney.

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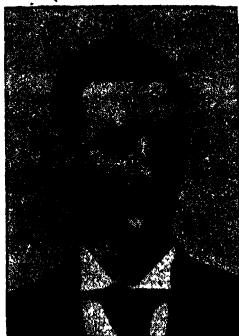
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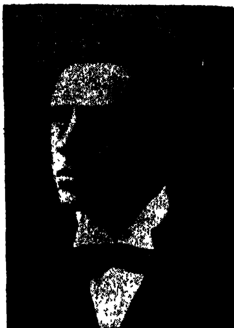
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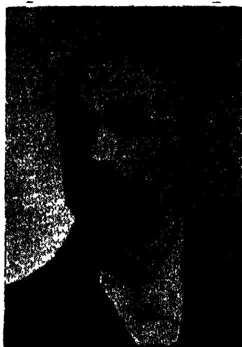
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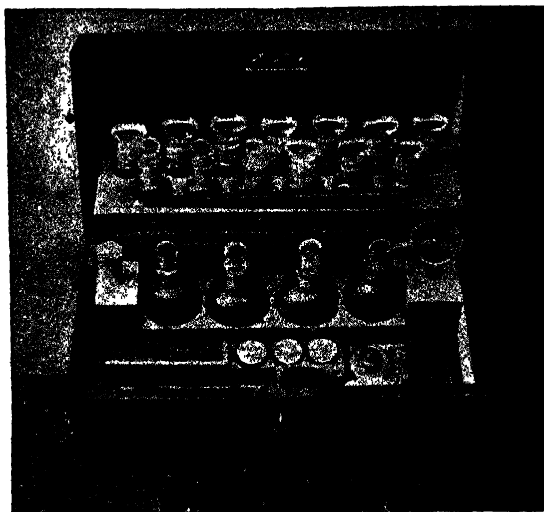
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